Gas Explosion Kills 2 in Downtown St. Petersburg

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The exact cause of the gas explosion remains unclear, the regional branch of the Investigative Committee said in a statement Sunday.

A woman and child were killed and 11 others were injured in a blaze that raged through an apartment building in downtown St. Petersburg following a gas explosion, the Interfax news agency reported Sunday, citing the Interior Ministry.

The gas explosion occurred on the fourth floor of a communal apartment in a six-story building on Bolshaya Konyushennaya Ulitsa just before 11 p.m. on Saturday night, the Interior Ministry told Interfax. The explosion led flames to spread through a 200-square-meter area.

Firefighters managed to extinguish the blaze on Sunday morning, Interfax reported. Eleven people were hospitalized with injuries of varying degrees of severity and 150 of the building's residents were evacuated, the report said.

According to witnesses, a thick smoke engulfed St. Petersburg's Nevsky Prospekt, the city's main thoroughfare, after the outbreak of the fire. Traffic was also interrupted in the

downtown core as emergency services workers fought the blaze and tended to the wounded.

The exact cause of the gas explosion remains unclear, the regional branch of the Investigative Committee said in a statement Sunday.

Regional investigators also announced that a criminal case had been opened in relation to the incident.

Under Russian law, individuals found guilty of negligence that caused the death of two or more people can face up to five years behind bars.

Investigators are currently probing potential causes of the fire and interrogating witnesses to establish the circumstances surrounding the incident.

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