

Fire Paralyzes Moscow's Domodedovo Airport

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A fire that broke out on the first floor of Domodedovo Airport on Thursday morning was relatively small — the flames only enveloped 15 square meters and were put out promptly — but nonetheless paralyzed the airport. More than 100 flights were delayed and some 3,000 people evacuated, Russian media reported Thursday.

The incident occurred around 7 a.m. Thursday in a storage room. The smoke rapidly spread into the ventilation system and filled the terminal, forcing emergency services to begin evacuating people, state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

“It didn't turn into an actual fire, but the smokescreen was thick, so the decision was made to start evacuation,” an unidentified source from the Moscow region emergency service was cited by the agency as saying Thursday.

While airport arrivals functioned normally, more than 100 departing flights were delayed. By 11:30 a.m. the airport was operating normally again, and the airport administration promised to have all delayed flights heading for their destinations by Thursday evening at the very latest.

Major traffic jams accumulated on highways and roads leading to the airport, and large crowds of people gathered both in and around the terminal. No one was injured during the fire.

The Moscow Interregional Transport Prosecutor's Office has launched an investigation into the incident.

The fire may have occurred due to building materials stored in violation of health and safety regulations, the RBC news agency reported Thursday.

Building work at the airport was being carried out by the Strabag construction company. Its spokespeople declined to comment to RBC in regards to the company's possible involvement in the fire.

Strabag management arrived at Domodedovo immediately after the fire was extinguished to determine whether their company's actions could have caused the fire, the news agency reported.

The incident could serve as a pretext for another round of investigations into the airport owners' identity, which remains unknown to Russian officials, even after a deadly terrorist bombing in 2011. Their identity is obscured by numerous legal entities owning different elements of the airport complex, registered both in Russia and offshore zones.

Dmitry Kamenshik, chairman of the board of directors of Domodedovo, said he was the owner in 2013, but Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin claimed in 2014 that the owners remained a mystery.

"We know these people, but they say they are not the owners," he was cited by RBC as saying in 2014.

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