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Moscow Officials Defend Sending Children to Boating Tragedy Camp

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Moscow authorities have defended their decision to send children to Karelia's Samozero summer camp despite reports of staff negligence, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

Officials failed to notice that both companies bidding for Moscow City Hall's summer camp contract in Karelia were owned by the same person, according to a report by Russia's Economic Development Ministry.

The Moscow's Mayor's office maintains that all procedures were followed correctly, and that all paperwork had been properly carried out.

“The process was completely normal,” said Vladimir Petposyan from Moscow's social services department. He said that it had been the camp's third time taking part in bidding process, but he “did not recall a second company.”

Samozero and its supposed rival Karelia Open are owned by Elena Reshetova, Kommersant

reported. The Economic Development Ministry report found that Karelia Open "delayed submitting a quote," and submitted deliberately high prices for its services when bidding for the Moscow government contract.

The company applied "without the intention of ever completing the deal," the report said.

The current tender system — which invites summer camps to bid for government contracts from the social services — has come under fire for allegedly placing greater value on cost than on ensuring the camps are safe and properly-regulated, Kommersant reported.

A group of 47 children from the Samozero summer camp, aged between 12 and 17, had been rafting on June 18 when the party was hit by a sudden storm. Fourteen children died following the incident, many freezing to death in the cold water. All had been sent to the camp by the Moscow City government despite ongoing concerns over negligence.

Karelian officials inspecting the camp found a number of health and safety violations on a visit in 2015, but did not hold management responsible, the Russian Investigative Committee found. Inspectors found sanitary problems at the camp, as well as inadequately organized activities for the children.

Five people have been arrested following the incident, including the camp director. Media reports claim that instructors had ignored bad weather warnings and had neglected to notify local authorities of the trip.

The camp has since been closed.

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