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Russian Fires Cause Billions in Damages, Says Greenpeace, Which Was Booted Out for Trying to Help

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Damages from the wildfires in Russia's southern Krasnodar region are estimated at 5 billion rubles ($79.5 million), according to a statement released by Greenpeace Russia on Thursday. The organization sent a team of volunteer firefighters to the region in September to help extinguish the fires, but local residents sabotaged their efforts and the team had to leave.

"When the [Greenpeace] expedition ceased its firefighting activities, the damage from the fire was estimated at 690 million rubles [$11 million]," the statement reads. "Sabotaging the expedition and not taking the necessary measures cost the state 4.3 billion rubles [$68 million]."

Read The Moscow Times' story about

the brutal attack on the Greenpeace firefighting team
and other cases of sabotage against ecology activists in Russia.

According to Greenpeace, the Emergency Situations Ministry thanked the activists for their effort in the Krasnodar region, but maintained that "the region and the Emergency Situation Ministry doesn't need any help from volunteers."

This doesn't quite add up, says Grigory Kuksin, the leader of the volunteer group that went to tackle fires in the Krasnodar region. The ministry and its firefighters, he says, are charged with protecting cities and towns, but not the wilderness, he points out. "All the firefighting equipment they have is suited for this particular task. Firefighters can't handle fire in the reed, for example. They can't approach it," Kuksin said. "It is silly to refuse qualified assistance from people who are trained, motivated, and better equipped."

Volunteer firefighters
in the Krasnodar region
were attacked with knives and stun grenades
at their camp in September.
A group of eight
men damaged property, slashed the tires of the group's cars,
and stole equipment. They
also painted on the camps' gates graffiti reading "Here are the
pendosy," (a derogatory
Russian term for Americans).

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