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Russia Struck By Another Lethal Alcohol Poisoning Outbreak

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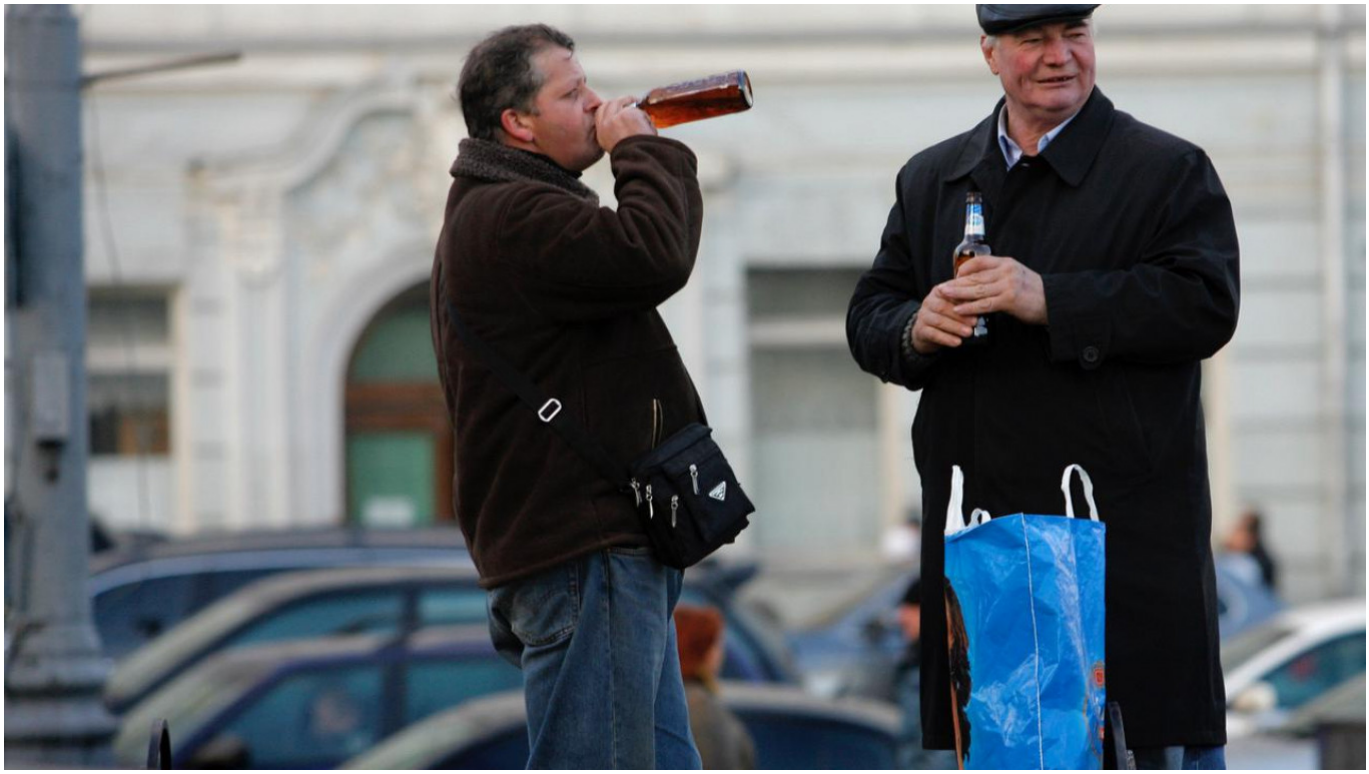

AP/ Mikhail Metzel

Police in the city of Orenburg have confiscated thousands of liters of illegal alcohol after another incident of alcohol poisoning in Russia.

In late December, one resident of Orenburg died and another was hospitalized in serious condition after consuming "surrogate alcohol" – non-drinkable alcohol consumed as an inexpensive substitute for vodka.

During the ensuing police investigation, authorities confiscated 26 thousand liters of illegal alcohol – including 896 liters of non-food alcohol products – between Dec. 20 and Jan. 1, the TASS news agency reported.

The haul came as the latest development in a "surrogate alcohol" scandal that has shocked Russia and raised government concerns about the dangers of illegal booze.

In December, nearly 80 people died in the Siberian city of Irkutsk after consuming

boyaryshnik, a hawthorne berry bath lotion with a high ethyl alcohol content. Investigators later discovered that the Irkutsk batch of boyaryshnik contained toxic methanol instead of ethyl.

The tragedy spurred the government to take action on a problem that many believe has only grown due to Russia's economic ills. On Dec. 23, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev instructed the country's consumer safety watchdog, Rospotrebnadzor, to suspend the sale of non-food products with an ethyl alcohol content of more than 25 percent for up to 30 days.

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Meanwhile, the authorities have cracked down on surrogate alcohol suppliers and distributors. The same day that Medvedev ordered the suspension, an Irkutsk court arrested the supplier of the tainted cosmetic. Additionally, police detained 13 of its distributors, mostly local kiosk owners.

In Orenburg, dangerous illegal alcohol is hardly a new problem. In 2015, more than 100 people died from consuming "surrogate alcohol" – a three percent rise compared to 2014, according to Rospotrebnadzor data. In the majority of cases, the alcohol was obtained illegally

However, not all poisoning cases came from consuming non-food alcohol products like boyaryshnik. At least nine people in Orenburg died from consuming counterfeit whiskey, purchased from an illegal seller either in person or online. Experts have concluded that the fake whiskey also contained toxic methanol.

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