

Putin Blasts 'Criminal Negligence' Behind Deadly Shopping Mall Fire, Amid Rising Public Anger

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Kremlin Press Service

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday visited the scene of a fire in a shopping mall that killed at least 64 people, and hit out at "criminal negligence" which he said was to blame for the high death toll.

Investigators looking into a fire, one of the deadliest in Russia since the break-up of the Soviet Union, said fire exits at the mall had been illegally blocked and the fire alarm system had not functioned properly. The fire swept through the upper floors of the Winter Cherry shopping centre in the city of Kemerovo, where a cinema complex and children's play area were located, on Sunday afternoon.

Related article: [The Kemerovo Shopping Mall Fire: What We Know So Far](#)

Putin, re-elected last weekend, arrived at the scene on Tuesday and laid flowers at a makeshift memorial to the victims of the fire.

“What’s happening here? This isn’t warfare, not an unexpected methane leak in a mine. People, children came to have fun. We speak of demographics and lose so many people, for what? Because of criminal negligence, because of sloppiness,” Putin [said](#).

Meanwhile, angry protesters demanded the resignation of local authorities at a rally outside the Kemerovo region administration not far from the scene of the deadly blaze as they disputed the official death toll.

A source in the emergency services told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency that 67 people had been killed in the fire that swept through the upper floors of the Winter Cherry mall in Kemerovo, while locals have claimed that dozens of people were still unaccounted for.

Dozens of children were feared to be among the dead in the tragedy in Kemerovo, a coal-producing region about 3,600 km (2,200 miles) east of Moscow. As well as grief, the fire has stirred public anger about apparent failures in fire safety standards at the mall.

“I wish you’d burn like my children,” one woman was heard yelling out earlier in the day as crowds chanted “Truth,” “Resign,” and “Murderers.”

Additional riot police vehicles, National Guard troops and police officers have been deployed at the site of the protest, [Interfax reported](#).

While failing to appear in front of the crowd, the Russian President met a group of concerned citizens outside the local morgue to tell them that a group of 100 investigators was working to establish the causes behind the fire.

“Don’t even doubt it, everyone responsible will be punished,” he was [cited](#) as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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