

Detained Business Owner Believes Minority Teenagers Started Kemerovo Mall Fire

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Nadezhda Suddenok, manager of the Zimnyaya Vishnya shopping centre in Kemerovo **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

One of the five suspects detained in connection with Sunday's deadly mall fire in Siberia has said that teenagers belonging to an ethnic minority may have ignited the blaze.

Forty-one children were among the 60 victims of the fire that swept through the Winter Cherry shopping mall in the city of Kemerovo. Russia's top investigator told President Vladimir Putin that an electrical short-circuit was the leading theory for the cause of the fire, naming arson a less likely possibility.

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"I believe that it was arson," Nadezhda Suddenok, the director of the company that rents the mall's top two floors was [cited](#) as saying in court by the Ekho Moskvy radio station on Tuesday.

Suddenok, who was arrested as a suspect in the wake of the tragedy, claimed that a group of people aged between 17 and 27 had been escorted out of the mall for harassing visitors in the month leading up to the fire.

"These teenagers were of different nationalities, I can't say which nationality exactly, but with a black beard, like those worn by [people] of the Chechen, Caucasus, nationality."

Suddenok went on to say that one young man "looked like a gypsy and we can describe him very clearly."

The detained company director denied claims that the doors of the mall's cinema had been locked or that the alarm system was broken, according to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

"There was not a single complaint. I didn't know that there were any problems," RIA [cited](#) her as saying.

An earlier version of this article stated that 64 people died in the fire, according to Russian authorities. The official death toll was later revised to 60, the Investigative Committee [said](#) in a statement.

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