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Russian Official Accused of Trying to Destroy Evidence of Deadly Mall Fire

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Danil Aikin / TASS

Russian prosecutors have accused an emergency official suspected of malfeasance in a deadly mall fire in Siberia of attempting to destroy evidence to hinder an investigation of the incident.

Sixty-four people, most of them children, were killed in March when a fire erupted at the Winter Cherry mall in Kemerovo. An investigation found that the fire had been caused by faulty wiring and poor safety standards at the mall, including a lack of fire alarms and blocked exits.

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Alexander Mamontov, the head of the Kemerovo Region's Emergency Situations Ministry, is one of 11 emergency responders, mall executives and contractors to have been arrested in

connection with the fire.

“Attempts were made to hide and destroy information. In particular, the accused gave orders to destroy the accounting ledger,” an investigator was quoted as saying at Mamontov’s court hearing on Thursday.

The former emergency official is accused of negligence and embezzlement.

Kemerovo’s Central District Court upheld the investigation’s request to extend Mamontov’s arrest until Sept. 25.

In early July, the colleagues of a fireman accused of negligence in the incident had reportedly threatened the survivors of the mall fire outside of a courtroom.

“Who will extinguish you when you catch on fire?” chief investigator Rustam Gabdulin quoted the firemen as saying, adding that the victims were also told they “should have burned with the children.”

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