The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Metals Factory Fire Sparks Environmental Protests in Russia's North Caucasus

October 23, 2018

ossetiaFB / Telegram

Hundreds of protesters gathered in the North Caucasus city of Vladikavkaz on Monday to demand the closure of the "Elektrotsink" factory, one of Russia's biggest metallurgical plants and the site of a major fire over the weekend.

The "Electrotsink" plant produces toxic heavy metals including zinc, lead and cadmium and employs around 1,800 people, making it one of the largest factories in the region. Locals accused the factory of failing to adhere to ecological standards and complained of health problems after a massive fire broke out at the factory on Sunday. Local emergency services declared that the air in the region had not been contaminated by the fire and did not pose a danger to public health.

Protesters gathered outside the regional government building in Vladikavkaz on Monday

evening to demand the closure of the factory after the mayor of Vladikavkaz, Makharbek Khadarzev, said the plant posed a danger to the city.

“Close the Electrotsink plant, get rid of what’s killing our health and our future,” he wrote in a post on his Facebook page on Sunday.

According to estimates by the regions’ Interior Ministry cited by the RBC news website, around 500 protesters attended the rally on Monday.

The local Region Online news agency reported that the head of the republic of North Ossetia, Viacheslav Bitarov, arrived at the rally to address the protesters, promising to support their demands for the factory's closure and raise the issue with President Vladimir Putin.

Embed:

> К Дому правительства во Владикавказе стягивается ОМОН. Протестующие отказываются прекращать митинг, скандируют «выходи!» и требуют встречи с главой республики Вячеславом Битаровым. Видео: телеграм-канал «Осетия» pic.twitter.com/vftD09JcQU
>
> — МБХ Медиа (@MBKhMedia) 22 октября 2018 г.

The regions’ parliament is scheduled to hold a hearing on the future of the factory on Thursday, Oct. 25, according to a government spokeswoman cited by RBC.

The protesters said they planned to resume their rally if the parliament failed to agree on the closure of the factory within three days, Region Online reported.

A Change.org petition to close the factory had gathered more than 12,000 signatures by Tuesday afternoon. It addresses President Vladimir Putin, saying that the Electrotsink factory has poisoned the environment for decades in North Ossetia and Ingushetia — a neighboring region which itself has been rocked by weeks of protests over a controversial land swap deal.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/10/23/metals-factory-fire-sparks-environmental-protests-russias-north-caucasus-a63271