

Russia Says It Won't Share Rocket Explosion Data as Suspicions Swirl

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Ivan Gushchin / TASS

Russia told an international organization set up to verify a ban on nuclear tests that a military testing accident in northern Russia earlier this month was none of its business and that handing it radiation data was entirely voluntary.

Russia has acknowledged that five nuclear workers were killed in the explosion on Aug. 8, which occurred during a rocket engine test at sea in far northern Russia. The Vienna-based Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) said that four Russian monitoring sites closest to the mysterious explosion [went offline](#) days after the blast, fueling suspicions that Russia may have tampered with them.

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Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov [said](#) his country's transmission of data from radiation stations to the CTBTO was voluntary and that the Aug. 8 accident was not a matter

for the CTBTO anyway, Interfax reported Tuesday.

Nuclear experts interviewed by The Moscow Times agreed that Russia's monitoring stations likely went offline to keep other countries, primarily the United States, from finding out exactly what had exploded in the accident.

"I think this is more related to counterintelligence activities; not nuclear, but national security," said Alexander Uvarov, the chief editor of Russia's AtomInfo website.

"The issue isn't that [radiation] levels are dangerous for people, it's just a matter of secrecy [for the authorities]," Andrei Frolov, the co-chair of Moscow's Public Environmental Organizations Union, told The Moscow Times.

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The four stations may have intentionally stopped transmitting signals to hide the composition of isotopes involved in the accident from other countries, an unnamed nuclear industry source [told](#) the Znak.com news website later on Tuesday. Russia's state nuclear agency, Rosatom, has said that the accident involved "isotope power sources."

Asked about the CTBTO's assertions on Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that he was confident that government agencies in charge of the relevant radiation monitoring stations had been doing their job correctly. He added that he did not have precise information about whether and how Russian radiation monitoring stations transmitted data.

The CTBTO said on Tuesday the radioactive-particle sensors of at least one of the four Russian monitoring stations in question were transmitting again.

U.S. President Donald Trump [suggested](#) last week that the explosion happened during the testing of a nuclear-powered cruise missile which has been touted by President Vladimir Putin. The pro-Kremlin Izvestia newspaper, however, [disputed](#) any connection with the 9M730 Burevestnik and said the authorities had been testing an advanced booster device.

There has been contradictory information about the accident's consequences. The Defense Ministry initially said background radiation remained normal after the incident, but Russia's state weather agency said radiation levels in the nearby city of Severodvinsk had risen by up to 16 times.

Putin said on Monday there was no risk of increased radiation levels, but that all necessary safety measures were being taken.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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