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Dam Collapse Kills at Least 15 Gold Miners in Siberia

By Reuters

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MChS in Krasnoyarsk Region / TASS

At least 15 gold miners were killed on Saturday when a dam collapsed, flooding an artisanal mining encampment in a remote part of Siberia, officials said.

Heavy rains had weakened the dam and water broke through, sweeping away several cabins where the artisan miners lived, about 160 kilometers south of the city of Krasnoyarsk.

President Vladimir Putin ordered all necessary measures to be taken to help those affected, to identify the cause of the disaster and prevent any impact on a nearby residential area, Interfax quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying.

Russia is one of the world's top gold producers with most of its output coming from large professional industrial mines. However, alluvial production, which is usually operated by small firms, still contributes some of the country's gold.

Alluvial or artisanal gold mining in Russia is usually small-scale, but is still conducted by officially registered firms which are supposed to abide by health and safety rules.

Krasnoyarsk officials said in a statement that water released by the dam partially flooded two dormitories of the rotational camp in which 74 people lived, adding that 13 people were still missing.

A Russian investigative committee said it had launched a criminal probe into violation of safety rules at the gold mining spot, while local authorities said the collapsed dam was not registered by official bodies.

Interfax said the miners were part of Siberian privately-held Sibzoloto, which unites several artisanal mining teams.

Sibzoloto was not immediately available for comment.

Sibzoloto produced about 3 tons of gold in 2018, Sergei Kashuba, the head of Russia's Gold Industrialists' Union, a non-government producers' lobby group, said. Sibzoloto is not a member of the union, he added.

Russia produced 314 tons of gold in 2018.

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