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Peat Fires Smolder in Siberia Despite Bone-Chilling Temperatures

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"We didn't have wildfires reaching this far north to our area for many years," a local scientist said. **The Siberian Times**

Siberian peat fires have continued to burn after a year of record-setting wildfires in and around the Arctic Circle despite temperatures below minus 50 degrees Celsius, The Siberian Times reported Wednesday.

Footage showing smoke rising from the snow in January and November offers physical evidence of the "zombie fire" phenomenon, which describes summertime blazes that continue smoldering through the winter, eventually igniting new fires. European scientists have voiced concerns that "zombie" fires could be causing earlier-than-normal wildfires.

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A local resident who filmed the peat fires last weekend said the area was located near the site of last summer's wildfires, which took place amid "extremely hot and dry weather."

“It must be either peat on fire here, or, as some hunters who noticed these fires suggest, possibly young coal [lignite],” The Siberian Times quoted the man, Ivan Zakharov, as saying.

Regional media that shared a video of the November peat fires said villagers report seeing still-active fires as late as the end of January, according to The Siberian Times.

“The summer fire didn’t stop,” the Tomponsky Vestnik newspaper said.

“We didn’t have wildfires reaching this far north to our area for many years,” scientist Nikita Zimov told The Siberian Times, recalling the previous surge in fires in the 1980s.

The republic of Sakha, Russia’s largest and coldest region, is in the midst of one of its coldest winters in years with mercury slipping below minus 59 C.

Scientists fear that, in addition to causing an early start to wildfire seasons, “zombie” fires could accelerate permafrost melt that triggers unpredictable damage and greenhouse gas emissions.

Russia, the world’s fourth-largest greenhouse gas emitter with an economy heavily dependent on oil and gas, is warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the world due to its vast Arctic territories.

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