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Russian Miner Nornickel Pays Record $2Bln Fine for Arctic Oil Spill

By AFP

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Nornickel was found liable for an oil fuel leak which poured 21,000 tons of diesel into the lakes and waterways surrounding its Arctic base. **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

Russian mining giant Norilsk Nickel announced Wednesday it had paid a nearly $2 billion fine for a giant fuel spill in the Arctic last year.

Some 20,000 tonnes of diesel leaked into lakes and rivers near the northern city of Norilsk in May last year when a fuel reservoir collapsed at a power plant owned by Norilsk Nickel.

President Vladimir Putin declared a state of emergency and ordered the mining conglomerate, which is owned by one of Russia's richest men, to pay for the spill.

Norilsk Nickel, also known as Nornickel, said in a statement Wednesday that it had paid 146.2 billion rubles ($1.9 billion) "for damage caused to the environment" in the May 29, 2020, leak.

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The company last month said it would not dispute a court ruling holding it responsible for the incident and ordering the mining group to pay out the penalty.

Before the ruling the group said it would cover the cleanup costs but contested the sum of the fine, estimating the damages to be significantly lower.

Vladimir Potanin, the company's main shareholder, recently said that Norilsk Nickel had "learnt an important lesson" from the catastrophe.

The company said it had since "completely revised its approach to environmental risk management," noting in particular that it wants to gradually replace diesel fuel with cleaner natural gas in its activities.

The diesel leak was one of the worst oil spills in Russia, which frequently experiences environmental disasters usually caused by ageing infrastructure and negligence.

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