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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

More Than 50 Dead in Siberia Coal Mine Accident

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Rescuer Alexander Zakovryashin, injured in a search and rescue operation after the Listvyazhnaya coal mine accident. **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

More than 50 people have died Thursday after smoke filled a Siberian coal mine in the latest disaster to hit Russia's mining industry.

Senior managers at the mine in Russia's Kemerovo region have been detained for suspected safety violations.

Russian news agencies quoted local authorities as saying 52 people died, including miners and six rescuers who had been part of an aborted search operation.

After all inside the mine were presumed dead, one surviving rescuer was found and taken to the hospital, acting Emergency Situations Minister Alexander Chupriyan said Friday.

The Listvyazhnaya coal mine, near the town of Belovo 3,600 kilometers east of Moscow, filled with smoke early Thursday with 285 people inside, Governor Sergei Tsivilev wrote on his

Telegram channel.

The emergency services told Interfax that 239 miners were evacuated following the explosion, which happened at 04:30 a.m. Moscow time.

Search-and-rescue efforts for the trapped miners were suspended until Friday morning due to high methane concentrations and the risk of another explosion.

A team of six rescuers sent to find the trapped miners stopped responding to communications, the emergencies ministry said. Interfax quoted a local official as saying they had suffocated.

According to regional authorities, 38 miners have been hospitalized with injuries and another 13 are being treated for their injuries on an outpatient basis.

RIA Novosti reported that three of those hospitalized are in critical condition.

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Embed:

> Уголовное дело возбудили по факту инцидента на шахте "Листвяжная" в Кузбассе: https://t.co/NKU5jLg5O7
>
> Видео: СК РФ pic.twitter.com/eKIwdQzE9y
>
> — ТАСС (@tass_agency) November 25, 2021

Deputy Prosecutor General Dmitry Demeshin was quoted as saying the incident was the result of a methane explosion caused by a spark.

The governor declared a three-day mourning period in the region beginning Friday.

Alexander Sergeyev, the head of Russia's Independent Miners' Union, blamed the incident on "sheer carelessness" toward safety rules by mine owners and management.

"And now they are shifting the blame onto the workers again. This is a systemic problem when people go into anything for the sake of profit," he told the Moskovsky Komsomolets tabloid.

The wife of Boris Piyalkin, one of the miners killed in the incident, told RIA Novosti that everyone knew that methane levels in the mine were high, but the miners continued to work anyway — and that they had put out another fire themselves just 10 days before.

"There was a [methane] sensor on [Piyalkin's] chest," she was quoted as saying. "He said, 'The sensor is beeping. I'll wet it with water so it doesn't beep.' And then they worked. Those are the conditions they worked in."

Embed:

> На видео последствия пожара на шахте «Листвяжная» в Кемеровской области. По предварительным данным, в системе вентиляции произошел хлопок и возгорание угольной пыли.
>
> Число пострадавших на данный момент составляет 45 человек. Заведено уголовное дело pic.twitter.com/tomwbdBa9a
>
> — РЕН ТВ | Новости (@rentvchannel) November 25, 2021

Law enforcement authorities opened a criminal case into the violation of industrial safety requirements that resulted in a person's death.

The Investigative Committee said the 47-year-old mine director, 59-year-old first deputy director and 36-year-old site manager have been detained as part of the case. If charged, they face up to seven years in prison.

"During the initial investigation, it was established that the detainees violated industrial safety requirements," the committee said in a statement.

The Listvyazhnaya mine is owned by SDS-Ugol, one of Russia's top three coal producers.

AFP contributed reporting.

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