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Russian Journalists Barred from Siberian Mine Disaster Survivors — Novaya Gazeta

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Fifty-one people died and over 70 were injured after a methane gas explosion at the Listvyazhnaya coal mine in Siberia. **Kuzbass regional administration**

Russian journalists have been barred from speaking with the survivors of one of the deadliest disasters to hit the coal-mining regions of Siberia in the past decade, the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported Sunday.

Forty-six miners and five rescuers lost their lives after a methane gas explosion that filled the Listvyazhnaya coal mine in the Kemerovo region with toxic smoke Thursday, with more than 70 others injured and hospitalized. One rescuer who had been presumed dead in an aborted search operation was found alive in what officials described as a "miracle."

Related article: More Than 50 Dead in Siberia Coal Mine Accident

Novaya Gazeta reported that journalists faced numerous obstacles in covering the tragedy, including being blocked from visiting the site of the disaster and submitting questions to the Kemerovo region's administration for pre-approval.

"We have a categorical order from the Russian Health Ministry to treat patients and not turn them into clowns," it quoted the Kemerovo administration's press service as saying.

Another administration spokesperson later clarified that the orders came from the doctors themselves and not federal authorities.

"Access to the victims is not allowed on doctors' recommendations," they were quoted as saying.

Additionally, Novaya Gazeta noted that authorities refused to disclose the date of the memorial service for the victims, adding that most journalists found out about it after the fact from reports by state-run news agencies.

Authorities have said the incident was the result of a methane explosion caused by a spark. Union leaders blamed the incident on "sheer carelessness" toward safety rules by mine owners and management.

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

Senior managers at the mine — which is owned by one of Russia's top three coal producers, SDS-Ugol — in the Kemerovo region have been detained as part of the case.

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