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‘Black Sky’ Pollution Alerts Sweep Siberian Cities

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Smog hangs over Kommunalny Bridge spanning the Ob River in Novosibirsk. **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

Several Siberian cities are under “black sky” emergency weather alerts as polluted air blankets swathes of the region and locals report a distinct smell of smoke.

Authorities in eight cities issued warnings for air pollution exceeding permissible levels, making it one of the largest areas to ever to be under an air pollution emergency at a single time, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

The so-called “black sky” alert was introduced in Russia’s third-largest city, Novosibirsk, on Tuesday, as well as in five neighboring Siberian cities and two cities to the east in the republic of Khakassia, RIA Novosti reported.

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The weather emergency requires Novosibirsk businesses to cut emissions by 15-20% by the evening of Feb. 11.

Krasnoyarsk, the easternmost Russian city to have a population over 1 million, has been under a “black sky” alert since Jan. 27 with the exception of one week.

Air pollution has long plagued Russia’s industrial cities in Siberia.

Combined with temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius and a lack of wind to blow away smog particles, this is a recipe for “black sky” warnings, said former RTVI chief editor and producer Alexei Pivovarov.

Last year, the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) reported high levels of air pollution in 23 cities in the Siberian Federal District. The RAS’ Siberian branch reportedly determined that 78% of Russia's two dozen most polluted cities are located in Siberia and linked the findings to increased rates of birth defects, childhood disease and cancers in the region.

Academics later classified the report in what news reports said was an attempt to avoid angering voters ahead of key parliamentary elections.

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