The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Soldiers Dug Trenches in Chernobyl Zone's Radioactive Soil – Ukrainian Official

April 07, 2022



A Ukrainian serviceman walks next to a road sign end of built-up area reads "Chernobyl", name of the city, in Chernobyl, Ukraine. **Oleksandr Ratushniak / AP / TASS**

Russian soldiers dug trenches in the highly-radioactive soil of the Chernobyl exclusion zone when they controlled the defunct nuclear power plant, a Ukrainian official confirmed to the U.S.-funded Voice of America (VOA) outlet Thursday.

Russian forces captured the Chernobyl plant, the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster, on the first day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. They withdrew on March 31 as Russia repositioned its forces away from the Ukrainian capital Kyiv.

Evgen Kramarenko, director of the Ukrainian state agency managing the exclusion zone, sent VOA a series of ground-level photos showing trenches dug in the area after visiting the site himself.

Undated drone footage shared Wednesday by the Ukrainian military purports to show trenches dug in the ground in the Red Forest — the most contaminated area of the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Tank tracks are also visible across the radioactive ground.

Embed:

> Video proof. russian command did order its soldiers to dig fortifications near the Chornobyl nuclear power plant in the radioactive Red Forest in March, 2022. Complete neglect of human life, even of one's own subordinates, is what a killer-state looks like. pic.twitter.com/VLjNTaW3T3
>
> — Defence of Ukraine (@DefenceU) April 6, 2022

In a March 31 statement, Ukraine's state nuclear agency Energoatom said that Russian troops at Chernobyl had been exposed to "significant doses of radiation," as they were not wearing protective gear while digging. They also claimed that soldiers withdrew from the site in panic at the first signs of radiation sickness.

Ukraine's military later said those soldiers have been hospitalized in the Belarusian city of Gomel, but neither Russia nor Belarus have confirmed this.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has said it is working to verify the reports that Russian soldiers were exposed to high doses of radiation while in the exclusion zone.

While disturbing the soil might increase the radiation exposure of occupying soldiers, "it is not plausible that it would lead to mass acute radiation sickness" given the age of the isotope decay, a nuclear energy expert told Newsweek.

In its March 31 statement, Energoatom said it was unclear what Russian troops were doing in the Red Forest.

The area got its name when dozens of square kilometers of pine trees turned red after absorbing radiation emitted from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/04/07/russian-soldiers-dug-trenches-in-chernobyl-zones-radioactive-soil-ukrainian-official-a77255