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Phone Scammers Coax Russians to Set Fire to Military Offices – Reports

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Molotov cocktail. **Ministerie van Defensie**

At least nine Russian military enlistment offices have been targeted in arson attacks linked to phone scams in recent days, media outlets reported Tuesday.

The first such incidents occurred in annexed Crimea and the central city of Kazan on Saturday, when two middle-aged women were detained trying to set local enlistment offices on fire, according to the Telegram channel Baza and the news website Realnoye Vremya.

The 62-year-old arsonist in Kazan told investigators that scammers threatened to kill her daughter if she failed to follow their orders, while a 51-year-old Russian language teacher in Crimea was said to have received similar instructions on the Telegram messaging app.

On Saturday evening, a 76-year-old man was detained in the northern city of Severodvinsk after throwing a Molotov cocktail at an enlistment office, according to the Telegram channel Shot, which is believed to have links to Russia's security services.

Law enforcement searches of the man's home found online communications containing instructions to "punish traitors" at the military office.

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In St. Petersburg, government-affiliated media reported that an unidentified man set fire to an enlistment office entrance and rammed its gates on his vehicle Monday evening.

The 53-year-old told authorities he was persuaded by a person — who introduced himself as a Federal Security Service (FSB) officer on WhatsApp — to "gain access to documents sent to Ukraine," according to the St. Petersburg-based Fontanka news website.

Similar incidents linked to telephone scams were reported Sunday and Monday in the regions of Moscow, Voronezh, Kaluga, Omsk and Chelyabinsk, according to Baza and the activist website Activatica.

"Almost every arsonist said they had been contacted by phone scammers," wrote Baza.

Many of those detained were reportedly charged with premeditated property damage, which carries a maximum prison sentence of five years.

It was not immediately clear who the alleged phone scammers were, or if they have any links to Ukraine, as some state-media outlets have claimed.

Scores of Russian military enlistment offices have been targeted by arson attacks following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin's mobilization of reservists in September.

In January, Russia issued its first prison sentence on terrorism charges for an arson attack on a military recruitment office.

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