

Russian Man Charged Over Relatives' Deaths After 66 Days Adrift at Sea

By [AFP](#)

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Mikhail Pichugin in a hospital. **Magadan Regional Government**

A Russian man who survived 66 days adrift at sea on an inflatable boat has been charged with negligence over the deaths of his relatives on board, investigators said Friday.

Mikhail Pichugin, 46, was rescued by a fishing vessel in October off the coast of the far eastern Kamchatka peninsula, more than two months after he set off on the dinghy with his brother and 15-year-old nephew, both of whom died during the ordeal.

Russian prosecutors have charged him with “violating traffic safety rules,” resulting in the death of two people, a regional branch of Russia's Investigative Committee said, according to Russian news agencies.

He faces up to seven years in prison if found guilty.

Pichugin comes from the city of Ulan-Ude in Siberia but was working on the far eastern island

of Sakhalin as a driver.

Pichugin set off from the coast of the eastern Khabarovsk region in the Sea of Okhotsk on Aug. 9 with his brother Sergei, 49, and nephew Ilya, 15, on a crossing to the island of Sakhalin meant to take a few hours.

When they failed to arrive, rescuers surveyed the area by helicopter and plane, suspecting the boat had drifted towards the Kamchatka peninsula, but found nothing and the search was eventually called off.

The boat was found around 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) from its starting point.

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According to prosecutors, Pichugin was not permitted to operate the vessel more than 1.6 nautical miles from shore.

They also accused him of not properly servicing the small boat's motor, the Interfax news agency reported.

“This led to a long uncontrolled drifting of the vessel in the waters of the Sea of Okhotsk,” Interfax quoted investigator Stanislav Astashenko as saying.

“And, as a result, the tragic death of two people, a son and a father.”

Pichugin may have survived because of his portly 100-kilogram (220-pound) stature, according to his wife. Russian television reported he weighed only 50 kgs (110 lbs) when found.

He gave a few details of how he managed to survive in the Sea of Okhotsk, telling journalists from his hospital bed he made it with “God's help” and sustained himself on collected rainwater.

His wife Yekaterina told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency: “It's a kind of miracle.” She said the men had only taken enough food and water to last two weeks.

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