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Russian Prosecutors Investigate Emergency Ministry Over Black Sea Oil Spill Response

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Sergei Malgavko / TASS

Russia's top prosecutor said Wednesday that his office will investigate the Emergency Situations Ministry over alleged failures in its response to the Black Sea oil spill.

The spill occurred on Dec. 15, when two aging Russian tankers were damaged in a storm, releasing thousands of tons of heavy fuel oil into the sea off the coasts of annexed Crimea and the southern Krasnodar region. Since then, volunteers and emergency crews have worked to clean up the oil and remove around 150,000 metric tons of contaminated sand.

Speaking at a meeting of senior prosecutors, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that the oil spill was caused by "disregard for safety rules and negligence," leading to "grave consequences for people, the environment and the economy."

"Given the miscalculations identified in efforts to protect the public and territories from

emergencies, we have planned an investigation into the Emergency Situations Ministry and its regional bodies," Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov said.

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The two tankers involved in the spill, the Volgoneft-239 and Volgoneft-212, were operated by Volgatransneft, while the fuel oil on board belonged to state oil giant Rosneft.

Regional transportation prosecutors, the Russian Maritime Rescue Service and the resort town of Anapa have filed three separate lawsuits against Moscow-based Volgatransneft and Perm-based Kama Shipping for damages.

Officials in Anapa said last week that they had spent 211 million rubles ($2.4 million) on cleanup efforts alone.

Oil slicks have continued to appear off the Black Sea coast three months after the spill, with both the Emergency Situations Ministry and Putin warning that warmer weather could cause heavy fuel oil to rise to the surface of the water.

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