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Zabaikalsky Region's Fire Safety Chief Resigns Amid Worsening Wildfires

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Rinat Khismatulin. **depgopb.75.ru**

The head of fire safety in Far East Russia's Zabaikalsky region has resigned as wildfires continue to devastate forests and threaten populated areas, regional authorities said Monday.

Zabaikalsky region Governor Alexander Osipov signed an order dismissing Rinat Khismatulin as head of the region's Department of Civil Defense and Fire Safety "at the official's own initiative." Khismatulin had served in that post since December 2022.

According to a statement on the regional government's website, Khismatulin will be temporarily replaced by his deputy Andrei Kovalchuk starting Tuesday.

A federal-level state of emergency was declared in the Zabaikalsky region last week, transferring responsibility for firefighting operations to Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry and allowing the deployment of additional resources.

The Zabaikalsky region accounted for 98% of the total area engulfed by wildfires in Russia as

of early Monday, according to the country's Aerial Forest Protection Service. State media reported that current fires cover an area more than 10 times the area burned at the same time last year and show no signs of slowing.

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Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry said Monday that fires had reached a village and destroyed four homes before being extinguished. Hours later, it reported that 10 more homes had been engulfed in flames in another village.

Experts attribute most of Russia's wildfires to human activity, such as the burning of dry grass near settlements intended to reduce fire risks. Other contributing factors include a lack of snow cover and an unusually early spring.

In response to the crisis, Osipov introduced financial rewards for citizens who catch suspected arsonists. Emergency authorities said dozens of fire starters have been identified, and law enforcement agencies launched three criminal cases into alleged negligence leading to wildfires.

Osipov has also restricted movement on intercity roads without the personal approval of local mayors.

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