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Firefighters Battle Massive Blaze After Truck Collision Derails Train in Western Russia

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A freight train carrying gasoline derailed and caught fire after colliding with a heavy truck at a railway crossing in Russia's Smolensk region near the border with Belarus, authorities said Friday.

The early morning incident took place when the truck drove onto the tracks in front of the oncoming train.

"The train driver applied emergency brakes, but the insufficient distance made a collision unavoidable," Moscow Railway said in a statement.

The impact caused the locomotive and 18 tank cars carrying gasoline to derail, sparking fires in several of the cars. Firefighters were battling blazes in six railcars loaded with fuel, the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

Both the train driver and his assistant sustained moderate injuries and were hospitalized.

Investigators opened a criminal case into safety violations, saying the truck driver is believed to have died.

Rail traffic along the railway corridor — a key route linking Moscow with western Russia and Europe — has been suspended while emergency crews work to contain the blaze and clear the tracks.

Russia has a history of dangerous level crossing accidents often blamed on drivers ignoring signals.

Separately in northwestern Russia's Pskov region, Governor Mikhail Vedyornikov reported a railway explosion, which did not cause train derailments or injuries. Authorities said at least two trains running between Pskov and St. Petersburg have been rerouted.

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