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One in 3 Russian Rescue Hubs Lack Aircraft as Carriers Decline Unprofitable State Contracts

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Vitaly V. Kuzmin (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Nearly one-third of Russia's search-and-rescue hubs are operating without the aircraft necessary to respond to aviation and maritime disasters, the pro-Kremlin Izvestia newspaper reported Tuesday.

Out of 111 mandated standby locations for Mi-8 helicopters and An-26 transport planes, 31 points reportedly remain without active coverage.

The gaps affect major regional centers including Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg, Kazan and Kaliningrad.

Private carriers cite a 75% deficit between tariffs set by the government and actual operating costs.

The disagreement centers on the break-even point for maintaining specialized rescue

equipment, with at least one private operator reporting an average monthly cost of 6.3 million rubles ($80,000) for round-the-clock standby.

The state offers around 5 million rubles ($63,500) per month under a two-year contract.

In 2025, private carriers declined to bid on long-term government contracts totaling 3 billion rubles ($38 million) across 13 Russian regions.

Civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia, according to Izvestia, said it has taken steps to address the industry's concerns by indexing contract fees by up to 28% for 2026.

It said further adjustments would require more transparent cost audits from private operators, which some companies have thus far been reluctant to provide.

One anonymous airline source claimed the gap in search-and-rescue aviation coverage could nearly double in 2026 if the state does not raise its rates.

In addition to carrying out civilian search-and-rescue missions, the hubs are also the primary recovery force for space crews. That means a lack of coverage in Siberia could lead to significant delays in locating cosmonauts and astronauts returning from the International Space Station.

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