

Russian Ex-Official Behind Waste Reform Leaves Country Amid Fraud Probe – Reports

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Denis Butsaev **Sofia Sandurskaya / TASS**

Former Deputy Natural Resources Minister Denis Butsaev left Russia shortly after being dismissed from his post as investigators opened criminal cases against several senior executives at the state-run waste management operator he previously led, the Vedomosti business daily [reported](#) Thursday.

Butsaev left Russia via Belarus on April 22, the same day Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed an order removing him from office, Vedomosti cited three sources, including one close to the investigation and two in government structures, as saying.

Authorities said at the time that he had resigned voluntarily.

Butsaev's reported departure comes as law enforcement authorities investigate executives at the state-run Russian Environmental Operator (REO).

REO was established in 2019 to oversee Russia's waste management reform, a Kremlin-backed initiative that has faced delays, rising costs and criticism over implementation.

According to Vedomosti, REO administrative director Yury Valdayev has become a suspect in a fraud case carrying a maximum prison sentence of 10 years.

The newspaper said criminal cases had also been opened against other senior executives, including strategic development director Yekaterina Stepkina and finance executive Maxim Shcherbakov.

One source cited by Vedomosti said Butsaev himself was mentioned in the cases. He headed REO from 2020 until March 2025.

An REO representative told Vedomosti that the company continued to operate normally. Russia's Natural Resources Ministry and law enforcement agencies have not yet commented on the reported case.

Butsaev could not be reached for comment, Vedomosti said.

REO oversees a waste management sector worth hundreds of billions of rubles and coordinates projects under Russia's national Ecology program.

A key part of the reform involved plans by RT-Invest, a subsidiary of Rostec, to build 30 waste-incineration plants across Russia. In 2020, the first five plants were projected to cost 200 billion rubles (\$2.66 billion).

President Vladimir Putin in December criticized delays and rising costs in the project, publicly rebuking Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov over the stalled rollout.

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