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8 Trapped After Permafrost Thaw Triggers Coal Mine Collapse in Russia's Far East

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Rescuers try to reach miners buried in a coal mine collapse in the Magadan region on May 1, 2026.
Sergei Nosov / Telegram

At least eight miners are feared trapped after a coal mine collapsed in the remote Magadan region of Russia's Far East, an accident officials are blaming on melting permafrost.

The collapse occurred at a site operated by the Kolymskaya Coal Company. Alexander Nesterovich, the company's CEO, said Thursday that the accident was likely caused by the thawing of a "lens" — a localized underground pocket of ice or unstable rock.

According to the Interfax news agency, the disaster unfolded in two stages. An initial rockslide buried a piece of heavy machinery and its driver. As seven other workers rushed to rescue their colleague, a second, larger collapse buried the entire group.

Magadan region Governor Sergei Nosov said two helicopters were dispatched from the

regional capital to ferry mountain rescue teams, specialized equipment and emergency medical personnel to the remote site.

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Rescue efforts continued throughout the night into Friday, with crews clearing more than 2,000 cubic meters (70,600 cubic feet) of debris. However, authorities estimate that the total volume of the collapse reached approximately 80,000 cubic meters (2.8 million cubic feet).

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top investigative body, has launched a criminal probe into potential safety violations. Investigators are currently seizing company records and questioning management and staff.

The Magadan region is located around 5,500 kilometers (3,400 miles) east of Moscow.

Scientists have long warned that Russia — one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters and a major fossil fuel exporter — is increasingly vulnerable to disasters fueled by thawing permafrost.

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