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Hovercraft Accident Kills 5 Russian Tourists on Lake Baikal

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Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Buryatia

At least five tourists from the Moscow region drowned Tuesday after the hovercraft they were on capsized on eastern Siberia's Lake Baikal.

Emergency officials told state media that at least 18 tourists were on board the airboat, equipped with large aircraft-style propellers, when it tipped over near Turtle Rock on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal.

Thirteen people, including one minor, were rescued, according to Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry. Officials in Siberia's republic of Buryatia told RIA Novosti that rescue teams recovered five bodies.

Emergency service sources told TASS that the hovercraft was in good working condition before it capsized. The vehicle was believed to have been heavily overloaded beyond its passenger capacity at the time of the accident.

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top investigative body, said it launched a criminal probe into safety violations resulting in death.

Lake Baikal, a UNESCO World Heritage site, freezes over between January and April, featuring exceptionally clear and thick ice that attracts visitors from all over the world. Ice roads on the lake typically operate during the high season between February and March, when the ice becomes thick enough to support heavy vehicles.

In January and February, several Chinese tourists drowned while crossing Lake Baikal in vans.

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