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‘I Don’t Know When This Will End’: As Ukraine Steps Up Strikes, Crimea Grapples With Fuel Shortages and Blackouts

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A fire at a thermal power plant in Kerch, annexed Crimea, following a Ukrainian drone strike on June 23. **Social media**

Olesya, a resident of the Russian-annexed port city of Sevastopol, Crimea, has resorted to desperate measures to fill up her car’s gas tank. Recently, she and a group of friends spent hours trying to obtain a QR code that would allow her to buy just 20 liters (5.3 gallons) of gasoline.

“There were 10 of us sitting there, hoping one of us would get a code,” Olesya told The Moscow Times, withholding her last name for safety reasons.

Ukraine has stepped up attacks on supply routes and energy infrastructure serving Crimea in

recent weeks in what it says is an effort to isolate the annexed peninsula and disrupt military supply lines for Russia's full-scale invasion.

For people in Crimea, the campaign is transforming daily life. Residents who spoke to The Moscow Times said fuel has become scarce, rolling blackouts and water shortages are now routine and even everyday tasks like commuting to work or buying groceries have become increasingly challenging.

Authorities in Sevastopol have repeatedly tightened fuel restrictions over the past month, initially limiting sales to cash purchases, then to prepaid fuel cards and vouchers.

Residents were later allowed to buy no more than 20 liters (5.3 gallons) per week using QR codes distributed through the state-backed messaging app Max. Fuel sales were subsequently suspended altogether before limited QR code distribution resumed last week.

While Olesya initially refused to install Max, she said she eventually relented after running out of alternatives.

"My friends and I all gathered at my apartment and everyone tried to get a code for my car," she said.

Sergei Aksyonov and Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Kremlin-appointed heads of Crimea and Sevastopol, declared a state of emergency last week without specifying how long it would remain in place.

Crimea previously faced gasoline supply disruptions in the fall of 2025, when drivers waited for hours in lines outside gas stations across the peninsula.

This time, as of late June, there were few lines left. Residents said that was because gasoline was no longer available to most private motorists.

According to residents, gasoline is largely reserved for emergency services, police, firefighters, utility companies and businesses with existing supply contracts.

Related article: Regions Calling: As Fuel Crisis Widens, Russia's Regions Brace for the Worst

People have vented their frustration in comments on Governor Aksyonov's social media posts.

"When will the fuel problems be resolved?" one Crimean resident named Anna wrote.

Some residents have started traveling to southern Russia to buy gasoline.

Mikhail, a resident of the city of Simferopol, told The Moscow Times that gas station employees in Russia's Krasnodar and Rostov regions have refused to sell fuel to people driving Crimean-registered cars.

"They tell me they don't have gasoline for Crimean residents, only for locals," he said. "To fill up a full tank and bring 200 liters of fuel home, I stopped at every gas station along the M-4 and topped up as much as I could wherever I could."

Mikhail said he made the nearly day-long trip because he wanted to keep enough gasoline on hand to evacuate his family from Crimea if necessary.

“There’s no gasoline here. The children constantly hear explosions, and electricity and water are rationed. I don’t know when this will end,” he said. “I don’t want to rely on trains either. They’re either canceled or rescheduled. It’s better to have a supply of gasoline. Here, unlike in Sevastopol, you can’t buy gasoline, not even in theory.”

Olesya, the Sevastopol resident, said that although she does not use her car often, she prefers to keep the tank full as she regularly drives to visit her parents, who live three hours away.

In early June, she used up the fuel vouchers she had received from her employer. They were enough for one trip to see her parents and a few trips to the grocery store to stock up on food.

Olesya said she has never managed to secure a QR code despite her and her friends’ efforts.

“I don’t know what to do,” Olesya said. “At the start of the month, my parents tried to get this code for me so I could fill up. I hadn’t installed Max on principle. Then there was no gasoline at all. Now it’s back, so I had to install the app to be able to fill up. We got together at my place with friends, and everyone tried to get a code for my car.”

Russian authorities have struggled to keep fuel flowing to Crimea, the first Russian-held region to experience widespread gasoline shortages amid Ukraine’s campaign to disrupt supply routes.

The shortages have also spawned a black market, with some Crimean residents traveling to Russia to buy gasoline and resell it through local messaging groups for as much as 350 rubles ($4.83) per liter, compared with around 80 rubles ($1.10) before the shortages.

Although the online marketplace Avito bans advertisements for gasoline sales, residents said offers continue to circulate in local chat groups dedicated to finding fuel on the peninsula and that many of the sellers appear to be scammers.

Related article: Crimea Declares State of Emergency After Ukraine Hits Energy Grid

The fuel shortages have coincided with Ukrainian drone strikes on power facilities that have left parts of Crimea without electricity and water.

Backup power sources like diesel generators can provide only limited relief because diesel is also in short supply, residents said. The diesel shortage has forced many cafes, shops and shopping malls to close, with grocery stores among the few businesses able to afford to keep generators running.

Power outages have also contributed directly to water shortages, as pumping stations cannot consistently supply water to homes.

“Our town is in the steppe. Water always has to be pumped here. When there’s no electricity — and there has barely been any over the past week — there’s no water,” said Yekaterina, a mother of two from Dzhankoy.

She said one of the hardest parts of not having consistent running water is having to check at night whether the water supply has returned.

“It’s very hot right now. I can’t bathe or do laundry. It’s not even always possible to go to the bathroom. Sometimes I have to rush over to relatives who have water when I don’t,” she said.

Yekaterina said her five- and seven-year-old children also struggle to understand why they cannot always watch cartoons or play games on her phone.

The crisis is also taking a toll on Crimea's tourism industry, a key driver of the peninsula's economy, just as the peak summer travel season gets underway.

Owners of hotels, guesthouses, wineries and tour operators have reported a sharp increase in booking cancellations starting this month.

Maxim, a Crimean resident who rents out rooms in a small cottage on the outskirts of Yalta, said he does not know how to save his business.

He said he hopes that Crimea’s state of emergency will at least help him freeze his loan payments as a business owner.

“I took out a loan last year to renovate the cottage,” he said. “I thought I would recoup my costs this summer and pay off my debts. I was hoping that at least local tourists would come. In the end, even those who live in Crimea have stopped coming.”

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