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Regions Calling: Do Russians Care About Air Raid Alerts?

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Smoke rises after a Ukrainian drone attack on a Wildberries warehouse in Novosemeykino, Samara region, Aug. 2, in this still image obtained from a video. **Social media / via Reuters**

Hello and welcome to Regions Calling, your guide to developments from beyond the Russian capital by The Moscow Times.

On Monday, seven beachgoers were killed and 47 others injured in a Ukrainian drone strike on the Black Sea resort town of Arkhipo-Osipovka, marking one of the deadliest attacks on the **Krasnodar region** since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

Though the moment the drone crashed on a crowded beach was captured on video, eyewitnesses claimed they did not hear sirens warning of an incoming attack.

Attacks similar to that in Arkhipo-Osipovka are becoming increasingly frequent, but are Russia's regions and its residents prepared to face them?

We asked Russians from seven regions to share how they learn about incoming Ukrainian drones and missiles and — most importantly — how they respond to the warnings.

But first, a look at the latest news from the regions and updates on the fuel crisis:

The Headlines

- Residents of the **Tyumen region** in western Siberia have not had access to clean tap water since mid-July, when heavy rains caused historic flooding along the Tura River, the city's main source of drinking water. The flood triggered a mass fish die-off, while residents complained that the tap water gained an unusual color and smelled of hydrogen sulfide and sewage.

  Although authorities deployed water tankers in some residential areas last week, locals dubbed the efforts insufficient and reported having to stand in long lines in sweltering heat, only to find supplies exhausted.

- Meanwhile, authorities in the **Yamalo-Nenets autonomous district** located within the Tyumen region introduced a region-level state of emergency over ongoing wildfires. As many as 176 active fires were recorded in the district on Wednesday, with officials blaming hot weather, thunderstorms and drought.

  More than 3 million hectares of forest have been destroyed by fires so far this year, including over half a million hectares destroyed within the past week, according to Russia's Aerial Forest Protection Service.

- Activists in the **Irkutsk region** in southeastern Siberia have secured enough students to open the first Buryat-language school grade. Buryat-language activists earlier accused the school's administrators of attempting to "sabotage" enrollment by warning parents of excessively difficult Buryat language exams and failing to explain eligibility requirements.

  Buryats, a Mongolic ethnic group indigenous to the region, were colonized by Russia in the 17th century with their historic territories divided between the modern-day **republic of Buryatia** and the **Zabaikalsky** and **Irkutsk regions**.

- Scientists have discovered 39 clusters of animal remains in the Franz Josef Land archipelago, Russia's northernmost territory, after permafrost thawed to record depths. The Arctic Floating University expedition found bones from whales, pinnipeds — most likely seals — and reindeer, the latter of which researchers believe to be several thousand years old.

  Permafrost, which covers about 65% of Russia's territory, is rapidly degrading as the planet warms, releasing greenhouse gases that further accelerate climate change.

- Ukraine is carrying on with its drone strike campaign targeting logistics centers and warehouses of Russian online retailing giant Wildberries. The attacks, which affected the sites in cities as far as St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, have wiped out a significant

portion of Wildberries' storage capacity and cost third-party merchants hundreds of billions of rubles, according to Forbes Russia.

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Fuel Crisis: The Latest

- Fuel-purchasing limits have been reintroduced and bus routes suspended across several regions as gasoline shortages persist.

  Lukoil and Gazprom stations in the **Volgograd region** imposed purchasing limits in response to what they described as extraordinary demand. In Siberia's **Zabaikalsky region**, the NefteMarket chain stopped serving private customers at 20 stations and tightened purchasing limits at those still operating. The **Krasnoyarsk region** also reintroduced gasoline restrictions, with stricter limits reported at stations along intercity highways, while authorities in the region's Bogotol district suspended 24 bus routes.

- Authorities in Krasnoyarsk temporarily lifted fuel-purchasing limits during President Vladimir Putin's visit to the Siberian city on Monday.

  "The boss has arrived, and he brought gasoline for the day," one Krasnoyarsk resident said.

  Prices at local gas stations fell by 24 rubles per liter on the eve of Putin's visit, before returning to their previous levels on the morning after his departure. Similar measures were introduced when Putin visited an aircraft factory in the **Irkutsk region** last month.

- The **republic of Bashkortostan**'s head Radiy Khabirov said the republic will not lower fuel production levels despite a series of Ukrainian drone attacks on its refineries over the past month.

  "We will continue to produce as much as we have been," Khabirov said Monday. "Moreover, during the period of increased attacks, we have even increased production. We have fuel."

  Just days after Khabirov's remarks, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his military struck the Bashneft-Novoil refinery in Ufa, which processes 7.4 million metric tons of crude annually.

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The Spotlight

July saw the highest monthly number of recorded civilian casualties on both sides since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with 634 confirmed deaths, according to the independent war monitor Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT).

Though approximately 70% of these casualties occurred in Ukraine, the share of deaths recorded in Russian-controlled territories is on the rise as Kyiv has ramped up its long-range drone strike campaign in recent weeks, CIT said.

At least 12 Russian civilians were killed this week alone, including seven beachgoers in Arkhipo-Osipovka and five employees of a warehouse in the city of Chekhov in the **Moscow region**.

For onlookers, this news might seem reason enough to make millions of Russians fear for their lives and seek shelter in bomb shelters. But do people on the ground share this sentiment? And do they know about possible attacks at all?

Here is what people in the regions told us:

Belgorod, Belgorod region

"The sirens work during a missile attack threat. Whether sirens should work during drone attacks is constantly being discussed; sometimes [officials] turn them on, sometimes they are off," said a Belgorod native, adding that people "no longer care" enough about the attacks to take shelter.

Kursk, Kursk region

"The warning system works here. There are sirens, alerts on social media. You can hear how anti-missile systems are working — the blasts over the city are very loud," one local told The Moscow Times.

"We no longer react to this. Such periods sometimes last for a very long time. If the children are outside, we bring them back home. The siren is sounding again right now as we speak..."

Voronezh region

"Since the beginning of this year, we have been hearing aerial attack sirens far more often, especially since Wildberries bombings began...their warehouses are very close to where I

live," one resident of the southern region said.

Locals who spoke to The Moscow Times said they find air raid alert systems unreliable, with both SMS notifications and sirens sometimes turning on about 10 minutes after the attack has passed.

Though most Voronezh region residents appear unwilling to disrupt their daily routine by going to the shelter, some admit to having become more cautious in the wake of deadly attacks on Wildberries logistics centers.

"I've started monitoring various Telegram channels regarding air threats and drone flight patterns. I'd never done this before, but it's become quite relevant lately, especially when I see such events happening right next door," said the same local.

Meanwhile, a female resident of the regional capital Voronezh said she always hides in the bathroom when air raids catch her at home.

"If I am outside, I usually don't react to them in any way, just try to get to my destination as soon as possible," she added.

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Krasnodar, Krasnodar region

"The [attack] warning system works through SMS, which we get regularly but don't really do anything about it," one resident said.

"There was a siren at night recently, but we didn't do anything. If it happens again in the future, we think of hiding in the bathroom."

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St. Petersburg

"I usually get an SMS [about incoming drones]. There are sirens here, but they are only turned on in serious cases and we didn't have those yet."

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Ufa, republic of Bashkortostan

"I work right near the local refineries. I was really scared during the June attack, then by July it became a norm. It is our new reality, sadly," one resident said, adding that he just "keeps working or goes to the window to see if anything's flying" during air attack alerts.

Residents of Russia's major oil refining hub said air raid sirens work only in the city's industrial zone and people in other areas have to rely on SMS notifications that often arrive with a delay.

“Frankly, I don’t do anything during the alerts. We are all just used to them,” another Ufa resident told The Moscow Times.

Kazan, republic of Tatarstan

“I get alerts from the neighboring republic of Mari El all the time. No point in reacting to them, just added stress and lack of sleep,” one woman told The Moscow Times.

Another resident echoed this sentiment, saying they never receive SMS notifications about incoming drones, but can hear “the howl of sirens every morning.”

“We react by doing nothing. Just wait until it shuts up and go back to sleep,” they said.

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Photo of the Week

Albert Okotetto, an Indigenous Nenets marathoner from the **Yamalo-Nenets autonomous district**, celebrates his completion of a 3,200-kilometer (2,000-mile) run from Moscow to Noyabrsk, the capital of his native region.

Okotetto covered the distance in 57 days while carrying a jogging stroller with a tent, bedding, spare clothes, shoes, water and food.

“My runs are a way to pay tribute to the endurance of my people. My ancestors' way of life allows me, as a sedentary Nenets, to demonstrate exceptional endurance thanks to my genetics,” Okotetto told the regional news outlet Muksun.

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