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Sochi Closes Beaches After Drone Attack Sets Oil Tanker Ablaze

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Social media / Reuters

Authorities in Russia's Black Sea resort city of Sochi and the neighboring federal territory of Sirius closed beaches after a tanker caught fire offshore following a reported attack by naval drones, officials said Tuesday.

Sochi Mayor Andrei Proshunin said the city's beaches and waterfront promenades would remain closed until further notice. The decision followed a meeting with security officials, emergency responders and public health and weather agencies.

"I ask residents and visitors to Sochi not to put themselves at risk and to wait for an official decision on reopening," Proshunin wrote on Telegram.

Sirius officials also closed all beaches and urged residents to limit their time outdoors and keep windows shut where possible.

"We are continuously monitoring water and air quality together with Roshydromet," Sirius

administration head Dmitry Plishkin said, referring to Russia's weather and environmental monitoring agency.

The fire broke out around 6 p.m. Tuesday, sending thick black smoke over Sochi. Preliminary reports identified the vessel as the Aframax Rio, which may have been carrying between 95,000 and 100,000 metric tons of oil, according to open-source information cited by the independent news outlet Astra.

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Transportation Minister Andrei Nikitin said the oil-laden tanker had been attacked by unmanned boats. He added that all 23 crew members, who are Indian nationals, were rescued.

"Oil is currently burning in the Black Sea," the Transportation Ministry said Tuesday night. "Firefighting can begin once the intensity of the fire decreases enough for rescue vessels to safely approach the tanker."

On Wednesday, Russia's Transportation Ministry said firefighters had extinguished the blaze and a joint task force with other ministries was beginning cleanup operations.

The ministry maintained that the fire on board the Aframax Rio did not cause an oil spill.

The Telegram news channel Mash reported that the Liberian-flagged vessel had been sailing from Novorossiysk to India and was almost fully loaded.

While local Telegram channels initially placed the tanker in international waters, the Ukrainian monitoring channel Crimean Wind said satellite imagery showed it drifting in Russian territorial waters about 11 kilometers (7 miles) off Sochi.

The news website Fontanka reported that an Emergency Situations Ministry vehicle had arrived at Sochi's port and beach entrances had been cordoned off. A burning smell was noticeable near the port, though people continued to stroll along the waterfront, the outlet said.

Residents elsewhere in the city also reported a strong smell, with one saying it was noticeable even inside a car.

According to shipping records, the Aframax Rio regularly transported oil from the Russian ports of Ust-Luga, Novorossiysk and Taman to India, Singapore and Saudi Arabia between 2024 and 2026.

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