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Russia Urges Oil Companies to Produce Lower-Grade Gasoline After Refinery Strikes

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Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak. **REUTERS / Anastasia Barashkova**

Russian authorities have urged oil companies to increase production of lower-grade gasoline to avert domestic shortages following a wave of Ukrainian attacks on refineries.

Producing additional volumes of fuel that falls below Russia's usual environmental standards was identified as a priority at a meeting chaired Tuesday by Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who oversees the energy sector, the government said.

Novak also instructed companies to continue importing gasoline, a measure introduced during this summer's fuel crisis, and speed up repairs at damaged refineries.

The government authorized the production and purchase of gasoline below the Euro-5 standard in August, allowing refiners to produce fuel meeting standards as low as Euro-2, which Russia banned in 2013.

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Euro-2 gasoline can contain up to 50 times more sulfur than Euro-5 fuel, which Russia introduced a decade ago: 500 milligrams per kilogram compared with 10 milligrams.

Under an Energy Ministry order, the production and sale of gasoline meeting the lower K2, K3 and K4 environmental standards, broadly equivalent to Euro-2, Euro-3 and Euro-4, are permitted until July 1, 2027.

Ukraine's latest campaign of refinery strikes, which began in late October, has hit at least 13 plants stretching from the Baltic Sea to Siberia.

The U.S. think tank Rand Corp estimated that three refineries — Norsi in the Nizhny Novgorod region, Yanos in Yaroslavl and Rosneft's Novokuibyshevsk refinery — have completely halted production.

The Ryazan refinery, which supplies Moscow and the surrounding region, has lost about 90% of its capacity, according to the same estimates.

Russia's largest refinery, in Omsk, lost half its processing capacity following a Nov. 11 attack. The Volgograd refinery has suffered a similar reduction, while the Kirishi refinery near St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest, is operating at about one-third of capacity.

Russia's total oil processing has fallen to an estimated 3.7 million barrels per day, roughly a third below its usual prewar level, according to the estimates.

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