

Munition factory explosion in Russia kills at least 13

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An explosion at the “Plastmass” munitions factory in the town of Kopeisk, near Chelyabinsk, Russia, has taken the lives of at least 13 workers. The explosion occurred in the night of October 22-23. As of this writing, several workers are still missing and six are hospitalized, five of them in serious condition. The factory produces ammunition and explosives.

The explosion was so powerful that it damaged holiday homes in the neighborhood and woke up residents in several districts of nearby Chelyabinsk, a major industrial city in the Urals with over 1.1 million residents. Much of the factory stood in flames, and 10 fire brigades had to work on putting it out for about three hours. During the rescue work, a second explosion occurred. The local news outlet 74.ru described scenes of chaos with residents and relatives of workers on the shift rushing to the factory to find their loved ones.

Two young girls whose mother worked at the factory were among those who rushed to the scene and told correspondents of 74.ru, “She is not at home and does not answer any calls. We do not even know whether she is here. They have a flexible schedule, and several shifts. We went to the entrance to ask at least which factory building [she works in]. They told us, ‘No comment, go away’.”

One resident of a home close to the factory told 74.ru, “I looked at the window—there was a pitch-black cloud in the grey sky. Then there was another explosion, but not that powerful. First, local firefighters came, then more came from the city (Chelyabinsk). Then came the traffic police and emergency services. First there were two ambulances, then three, then another three, and then I went out on the street and stopped counting. Then I understood that there was immense chaos. I saw a young man, drenched in blood, who was holding a

towel to his head. I asked him, ‘Do you perhaps need help?’ He said no. Then a small truck came and took him.”

A 30-year-old worker told the *Svobodnaia pressa* (*Free Press*) how she experienced the explosion at the factory.

“In our factory hall, the windows burst because of the explosion. The people were led out in a state of shock. The explosion may have occurred because of negligence. ... They have now changed the supplier of materials. It turns out that there is more negligence than management. The people [affected] have worked there for a long time. There were people of different ages working. Among them young girls who are leaving behind children. People are dying at the front and now this is happening here.”

One resident of Chelyabinsk wrote on the social media platform Vkontakte, “My son has also worked in this workshop, only a coincidence saved him from disaster. My fiancée has also managed to not go to work that day. Sometimes fate plays cruel jokes with us.”

The authorities denied initial reports, according to which the explosion may have been caused by a Ukrainian drone. Ukrainian forces now strike targets in Russia on a daily basis, including oil and gas refineries and other infrastructure. A criminal case was opened for “violation of safety standards” that led to the explosion, but it is unclear who exactly the authorities are investigating.

Acutely conscious of the immense grief and anger among workers over the explosion, the regional governor, Aleksei Teksler, was quick to declare Friday, October 24, a day of mourning in the region and promised that families of the victims would be paid 10 million rubles each (about \$125,265). Teksler also

announced that a street in Kopeisk will be named after the victims of the explosion.

No doubt in coordination with the authorities, the local Orthodox Church sprang into action to present itself, with the assistance of the media, as the main helper for the workers and their families. The Russian Orthodox Church has historically been a bulwark of political reaction and maintains close ties to the Kremlin, as well as far-right nationalist and antisemitic forces. With the invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime, the role of the Church in promoting the war and Russian chauvinism and diverting social tensions has become even greater.

There are good reasons for the nervousness in the Russian political establishment.

The disaster at Plastmass in Kopeisk is the second major explosion at a munitions factory in less than a week. On October 17, three workers died in an explosion at the Avangard factory in Sterlitamak in the Republic of Bashkiria. Like Avangard, Plastmass in Kopeisk is part of the state-owned military industrial giant Rostec, which is run by the Sergei Cheremezov, a close associate of President Vladimir Putin and a former KGB agent turned billionaire.

Also like Avangard, Plastmass was built during the industrialization of the Soviet Union in 1939 as a military factory. While details are not publicized, local media reports indicate that Plastmass employs at least several hundred workers. It is the largest employer in Kopeisk, which has a population of 140,000.

Production at the factory has increased five-fold since the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022. Meanwhile, it is almost certain that, like most of Russia's industrial infrastructure which was either looted or left to fall apart by the oligarchs that emerged out of the Soviet bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism, the factory has not been well maintained.

Explosions and major deadly incidents like the ones at Avangard and Plastmass are a grim reality for thousands of workers in Russia every year. Official figures indicate between 3,000 and 4,000 work-related deaths each year, a ratio of five deaths for 100,000 full-time workers.

This industrial slaughter, while particularly acute in Russia, is fundamentally a global phenomenon. In the US, the past month has seen several deadly incidents, including the explosion at a Tennessee ammunition

factory which killed 16 workers. Over the past few weeks, there have also been deadly incidents in Madrid, where four construction workers were killed, and Bangladesh, where another 16 workers died on the job.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees are placing a major emphasis on the need for workers to fight against this world-wide social murder through internationally coordinated action. As the WSWS noted in a recent comment,

Throughout the world, workers face the same exploitation by the same multinational corporations and their political servants. In the US, Trump's "America First" nationalism, backed by the corporate media and the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy, seeks to pit American workers against their class brothers and sisters abroad. But the Tennessee and Bangladesh tragedies show that workers share the same conditions and enemies. The fight for safe workplaces cannot be waged within the framework of nationalism or through the corrupt, pro-company union apparatus. It requires international unity and the independent organization of the working class.... The task facing workers is clear. Independent rank-and-file organizations must link the struggles of defense workers, auto workers, garment workers, teachers and all sections of the working class into a unified global movement against exploitation and imperialist war.



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