

Vice-Chairman of Investigative Committee holds meeting and hears reports on investigations in wildfires in Trans-Baikal Territory that damaged houses and killed people



A meeting led by Vice-Chairman of the Russia's Investigative Committee Andrey Lavrenko has been held today in Trans-Baikal Main Investigations Directorate. The Vice-Chairman heard reports on investigation launched in wildfires in Trans-Baikal Territory. He ordered to qualify actions of all the officials responsible for fire security, find out reasons and conditions that led to the fires and take measures to prevent them in future. Explicit instructions were given concerning each of the criminal cases.

More than 584 thousand ha of forest, over 240 houses in 18 settlements have been burned and 11 people have been killed by wildfires, including while putting them out and during evacuation, in Trans-Baikal Territory since the beginning of 2015. 11 more people are in hospitals and over 20 are being treated at home.

Investigators keep on actively gathering and consolidating the evidence. All preliminary investigative operations have been finished. The investigators examined the fire sites, checked the possible sources and directions of blazes. 369 people were recognized victims. Over 250 people, including 40 officials were questioned. Necessary forensic inquiries were assigned, searches and seizures conducted, the investigators are now processing the confiscated documents for evidence.

For now the investigators have enough evidence to prosecute acting head of the Federal Forest Protection Service for Trans-Baikal Territory Ruslan Balagur, remanded in custody earlier, for a crime under part 3 of article 293 of the RF Penal Code (negligence entailing death of two or more people). According to investigators, Balagur's negligence resulted in the fact that the planned wildfire control measures had been taken not in full. In addition, the improper response of Balagur to the reports of forest fires had led to forest and wildfires in Chita and Alexandrovsky Zavod districts of Trans-Baikal Territory spread to settlements damaging houses and other property while in Shilka District 2 people were killed by the wildfires.

In addition, the investigations charged Head of Aksha Territorial Office of the Federal Forest Protection Service for Trans-Baikal Territory Vladimir Murzin of abuse of powers (part 1 of article 285 of the RF Penal Code), On 11 April 2015, Murzin hid the information about the real area affected by a wildfire, which was over 10 thousand ha, and failed to take adequate measures to put it out. As a result the fire threatened to 5 settlements in the area. The wildfires were extinguished only thanks to efficient operation of rescue services and heads of rural settlements.

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