



Stock up on Baking Soda Before the Acid Fog Descends

OE Watch Commentary: Two of Russia's most polluted centers are in the Arctic. One is in the city of Norilsk, east of the Yenisei River, and the other is Monchegorsk on the Kola Peninsula, 145 kilometers south of Murmansk. Both are major producers of nickel, cobalt and copper. Heavy metals and sulfides pollute the air, forests and waterways at both locations. Wages are high and their products are an important part of the Russian economy. Additionally, the Russians have long maintained a military airbase at Monchegorsk. The government has made progress in cleaning up the environs, but anytime authorities advise wiping down one's floors with baking soda, it makes the ecological cleanup look at bit tardy.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“The authorities in Monchegorsk, in the northwestern Arctic Russian region of Murmansk, have warned residents to stay at home after the town was engulfed in a dense fog of hydrogen sulfide, the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported on its website on 9 March.”

Source: “Arctic Russian Town in Lockdown Over ‘Toxic’ Fog,” Caversham, *BBC Monitoring*, 9 March 2018.

The newspaper said the local administration had not officially said where the toxic fumes were coming from, but it recalled that sulfates are being processed in Monchegorsk by the Severonickel Kola Mining-Metallurgical Company, which is part of Nor Nickel - Russia's leading metals and mining enterprise. According to Novaya Gazeta, the town has been covered in hydrogen sulfide since 5 March.

The paper quoted the mayor's office as “saying diplomatically” that the maximum permissible concentration of the substance in the air had been exceeded “more than a factor of two”. Nor Nickel has also announced that it is stopping production “until weather conditions improve”. The fog is so thick that it is causing traffic accidents, according to the newspaper.

This is not the first time that Monchegorsk has been covered in a yellow mist... The incidents have always been associated with emissions from the Nor Nickel plant during windless weather...

Murmansk Governor Marina Kovtun has tweeted that the authorities are dealing with the situation. But Novaya Gazeta quoted residents as saying they are angry that the regional administration is not doing enough. The Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor) said on its website on 8 March that the maximum permissible concentration of hydrogen sulfide has not been exceeded in Monchegorsk. However, it advised residents to wipe their floors with baking soda, tightly close doors and windows, refrain from going outside and drink plenty of liquids.



Monchegorsk-railway and factories.

Source: By kallerna (Own work), https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/62/Monchegorsk-railway_and_factories.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.