

## 6 Countries Join Russian Firefighters

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Women wearing face masks against Moscow's smog on Thursday morning. The smog cleared up later in the day. **Mikhail Metzler**

Firefighters battling the worst blazes that Russia has seen in decades got a welcome boost Thursday when aircraft, firetrucks and personnel arrived to help from Italy and five former Soviet republics.

France, Germany, Poland and Bulgaria have also offered to help douse the wildfires, which were burning on a total of 196,000 hectares in central Russia on Thursday, the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

Three Italian jets, which arrived in Moscow at about 5 p.m. Thursday, will fight fires in the Moscow region, the ministry said.

Two Armenian jets carrying four water pumps were dispatched to the Nizhny Novgorod region, while two Azeri jets were assigned to the Lipetsk region, and two Kazakh helicopters will assist firefighters in the Samara region.

Two Ukrainian firefighting units joined two Ukrainian An-32 jets in the Voronezh region on Thursday.

Belarus sent a helicopter and 150 firefighters to the Ryazan and Vladimir regions and promised to dispatch 20 firefighting vehicles.

Belarus had planned to send two helicopters, but the Emergency Situations Ministry refused, saying it only needed one, Interfax reported, citing an unidentified ministry official.

Nevertheless, the ministry is "willing to accept aid from foreign colleagues," spokeswoman Irina Andrianova told Interfax.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich canceled a Crimean vacation to personally oversee preventive measures against fires that may spread to eastern Ukraine from Russia.

The Ukrainian Emergency Situations Ministry denied reports that fires had reached a restrictive zone around the Chernobyl nuclear power station.

Finnish firefighters were also on alert as Russian blazes neared their country's border.

Belarussian firefighters put out 10 wildfires near the Russian border Wednesday, Interfax reported.

The fire death toll in Russia rose to 50, with two bodies found under the ruins of burned-out houses in the Nizhny Novgorod and Voronezh regions. About 600 fires were burning countrywide Thursday, the Emergency Situation Ministry said.

The Defense Ministry denied reports that a secret communications center of the General Staff had burned down in the Moscow region. It also denied reports earlier this week that wildfires had reached a military supply base near Kolomna in the Moscow region, but later acknowledged that the base had been ravaged. The base fire prompted President Dmitry Medvedev to dismiss five Navy officials Wednesday.

The number of people left homeless by wildfires has topped 3,500, and Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin promised to provide them with new housing by Oct. 20.

The heavy smog that blanketed Moscow cleared on Thursday, but air pollution will remain high for the next few days, the federal weather bureau said Thursday. Record-setting high temperatures are expected to remain until at least Aug. 10 and may top 40 degrees Celsius over the weekend, RIA-Novosti reported.

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