

Trials Start Over Khimki Forest, Rechnik

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September 23, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

Moscow courts began hearings Thursday in two separate high-profile trials related to a campaign in defense of the Khimki forest and a defamation lawsuit over the police's attempts to raze the Rechnik neighborhood.

Teplotekhnik, the company contracted by the federal government to destroy part of the Moscow region forest to make way for an \$8 billion highway from Moscow to St. Petersburg, has sued 11 environmental activists, including their leader, Yevgenia Chirikova, who camped out in the forest in July to prevent logging.

The contractor filed a lawsuit with the Savyolovsky District Court, saying it lost almost 8 million rubles (\$255,000) because the work was stalled, the firm's spokesman told Interfax.

But Gennady Rodin, one of the defendants, said the company should sue President Dmitry Medvedev who halted the logging Aug. 26. He also said the activists did not obstruct the logging because they were promptly detained by police.

Chirikova told The Moscow Times on Thursday that the company had offered to settle the matter out of court but the activists had refused.

“Teplotekhnik's lawyer called me over the weekend and offered a settlement if we stopped obstructing the forest works,” she said. “I said I would think it over, but after discussing it with colleagues we decided to go on fighting despite the amount of the lawsuit.”

Teplotekhnik head Alexander Semchenko [told](#) Komsomolskaya Pravda in August that he had intentionally provoked the environmental activists to attack his workers July 23 in order to have them detained by police.

Meanwhile, Khamovnichesky District Court began hearings into a defamation lawsuit that the city police have filed against the Noviy Izvestia newspaper, Ekho Moskvy reported.

The newspaper, citing Rechnik residents, reported in January that police officers were involved in a crackdown on residents, beating those who tried to resist the destruction of their houses by court marshals.

Noviy Izvestia editor-in-chief Valery Yakov said Thursday that he did not expect to win the lawsuit but would appeal the expected decision, Interfax reported. He also said the police tried to pressure the media into accepting its side of the story.

“The lawsuit is absurd because we're asked to disprove direct speech,” Yakov said by telephone. “We're not defending the rights of our newspaper but a journalist's right to freely disseminate information.”

“If the police win the lawsuit, it will mean that journalists will no longer have to interview victims but those who harmed them,” he said.

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