

Beatings, Torching in Newest Khimki Forest Scuffle

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A new skirmish over efforts to clear part of the Moscow region's Khimki forest for a new highway saw two environmental activists beaten and an expensive forest harvester torched Wednesday — all with little apparent reaction from police.

Activists said they were able to stop the deforestation, which they called illegal, but the company clearing the trees denied the accusations, saying it had all necessary clearance to proceed.

"We were able to stop the logging, but some thugs beat two of our activists," Yevgenia Chirikova, the leader of the Khimki environmentalists, said by telephone.

She said the attackers were private security guards hired by Alexander Semchenko, the head of [Teplotekhnik](#), which is subcontracted to cut down the trees.

One of the victims has lodged a complaint with local police, Chirikova added.

The deforestation was stopped by Gennady Gudkov, a senior State Duma deputy and member of A Just Russia, who appeared on the scene, Chirikova said.

Avtodor company, which contracted Teplotekhnik to clear the forest, said unidentified attackers torched its forest harvester hours before the tussle Wednesday, Interfax reported.

The company did not identify any suspects or estimate damages, but said it has reported the incident to the police.

Police did not comment on the attack on the harvester or the activists Wednesday.

Avtodor also dismissed allegations about illegal deforestation, saying it has the clearance to proceed. Teplotekhnik was unavailable for comment Wednesday, but said on its web site last month that it has all necessary authorization to carry out the work.

About 175 of the 1,000 hectares of the centuries-old Khimki forest are scheduled for deforestation to make way for an \$8 billion Moscow-St. Petersburg highway. Part of the forest was cleared last year, but the work was put on hold because of a heated campaign by environmentalists headed by Chirikova.

President Dmitry Medvedev ordered a review of the highway last year, but the check ended with the government authorizing the project in December, saying it was too late to change the route as the deforestation was already under way.

Chirikova said Wednesday that the campaigners planned to pitch a permanent camp in the forest to stop the highway.

Meanwhile, the environmentalists face an inquiry by the Federal IT and Mass Media Inspection Service, which said an anti-deforestation leaflet may violate the media law, [Gzt.ru reported](#). The Khimki city administration — a foe of the forest's defenders — has complained to the agency that the leaflet, Khimkinskaya Pravda Live, is actually an unregistered media outlet, the report said.

The publication's editor, Alla Chernyshova, denied the claim and refused to visit the media watchdog's office for an interview Wednesday. The agency said it was looking into the case.

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