

9 Icebreakers Added to Keep Northern Route Open

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia will order three nuclear and six diesel icebreakers by 2020 to allow passage along its Northern Sea Route as the country seeks to tap Arctic oil and gas reserves, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said.

The country, which has 10 operating icebreakers now, aims to expand transportation links through northern waters, Putin said Thursday at a conference in Arkhangelsk, Russia.

The federal budget includes 22 billion rubles (\$733 million) in allocations over three years for the construction of new-model icebreakers, Transport Minister Igor Levitin said at the same event. "A new nuclear icebreaker, which is planned for next year, will be installed with safety and rescue systems. It will carry out search-and rescue operations at sea," Levitin said.

The Northern Sea Route has a special place among other water transport corridors, Putin said at the conference.

"We are set to turn [the Northern Sea Route] into one of the key trade routes of global scale and significance," Putin said.

Russia sees the future of the Northern Sea Route precisely as an international transport channel capable of "competing with traditional maritime lines by the cost of services and by safety, and by quality," he said.

Meanwhile, Rosneft president Eduard Khudainatov told Putin that projects involving the opening of Russia's Arctic shelf are completely without risk to the environment.

Khudainatov contacted the prime minister from the Prirazlomnaya oil rig in the Barents Sea.

Asked about the environmental risks posed by such projects, Khudainatov responded: "We know absolutely how to do it. We have begun this work and are absolutely confident that risk in the opening of the Arctic shelf is ruled out."

In developing Arctic deposits, Rosneft is making use of ExxonMobil's experience. Khudainatov said the two companies are setting up in St. Petersburg an Arctic scientific-project center that will partly be engaged in developing technology for protecting the environment.

ExxonMobil's Russia chief, Glenn Waller, told the prime minister that his company puts environmental safety and protection first. The company has operated in the Arctic for 80 years, 15 years on Sakhalin, without any spill, he said.

"Zero emission" into the environment from drilling or human waste is built into the Prirazlomnaya rig project, Putin was told.

"Where will it all go?" the prime minister asked. Waste will either be pumped into the strata or into special containers moved to shore for utilization, he was informed. Associated gas is to be used to supply the rig itself, particularly for drilling equipment.

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