

Heads Roll Following Oil Spill at Trebs and Titov

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Bashneft promised it would fire a "number of top managers" for the ecological disaster in April at the Trebs and Titov oil field. Above, a Bashneft facility in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Region.

Midsized oil producer Bashneft has fired two senior executives as the company tries to clean up an Arctic oil spill before the spring thaw arrives at the end of May.

A blowout at a wellhead in the Trebs and Titov oil-field complex resulted in at least 13.5 million rubles (\$434,000) of damage last month. The gusher lasted for more than 24 hours before rescue workers shut it down.

The director for Bashneft's department of oil and gas production Rinat Nagayev and senior vice president for oil and gas production Alexander Dashevsky have stepped down, company head Alexander Korsik said Thursday, RIA-Novosti reported. Bashneft promised it would fire a "number of top managers" for the ecological disaster in April.

Korsik denied that the men were in any way responsible for the oil spill that showered hundreds of cubic meters of crude from a 25-meter high oil fountain in the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district.

"[Their removal] is not because they are guilty of the accident, but because when such an accident happens in the company somebody must answer for it," he said.

About 824 cubic meters of spilled oil had been collected and disposed of, Bashneft said on May 11. The cleanup operation is under pressure to finish by the end of this month, when rising temperatures will lead to spring floodwaters, hampering the efforts and washing the remaining oil into surrounding water systems.

The April 22 accident happened as well No. 11 was being brought back online. Investigators have said it was the result of poorly trained staff and substandard equipment. Environmental groups have emphasized the danger posed by pollution.

Trebs and Titov are operated by Bashneft-Polus, a joint venture between Bashneft and LUKoil, in which they are due to invest 12 billion rubles this year and begin production from newly drilled wells in 2013.

Korsik said the accident had not affected the company's plans for the fields. "This will not delay the development of the project," he said. "We are on the same timetable as we were."

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