

# Putin Demands Reforms After Fire on Nuclear Sub (Video)

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The Tomsk nuclear submarine.

A fire broke out Monday morning on a nuclear-powered submarine docked for repairs in a town near Vladivostok, temporarily sparking fears that radioactive material could leak out.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said the fire was a reminder of the need to increase oversight at facilities carrying out repairs on naval ships, and President Vladimir Putin ordered Shoigu to prepare a report on how to avoid such incidents in the future.

“This is not the first time this has happened in Russia,” Putin told the defense minister in a video link.

The worst case of a submarine catching fire in Russia was one of the first catastrophes under Putin's leadership, when the nuclear-powered submarine Kursk sank in the Barents Sea in 2000, killing all 118 crewmen on board.

Shipyard workers look on while the fire aboard the submarine pumped black smoke into the air.

Monday's blaze was the second onboard a Russian nuclear-powered submarine in less than two years.

It began around 11:30 a.m. local time inside the multipurpose submarine Tomsk, which has been under repair since 2009 at the Zvezda shipyard, located in the coastal military town of Bolshoi Kamen. The crew evacuated as soon as they saw smoke, escaping without injury, an official in the Navy headquarters said, Interfax reported.

Thirteen firefighting teams from the Pacific Fleet and the Emergency Situations Ministry were dispatched to the scene and used special foam to put out the blaze. They managed to completely extinguish the fire by about 8:15 p.m. local time, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told ministry officials at a meeting Monday.

Shoigu said the nuclear reactor onboard the ship had been turned off prior to its being transferred to the Zvezda facility and all weapons had been taken off. He also said the equipment on board the submarine had not sustained any real damage in the blaze.

The fire started during welding works after an acetylene torch was used to cut through a grate, igniting a rubber seal, cables and paint, RIA Novosti cited an unidentified official at the shipyard as saying.

Since the fire was limited to the ship's main ballast tanks, which are external to the vessel's pressure hull, the local population was in no danger and the chances of an explosion were low, an unidentified Pacific Fleet official told RIA Novosti.

"A commission has been created to determine the circumstances and causes of the fire. Preliminary reports indicate that the fire may have been caused by a violation of safety procedures during welding," the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Major General Anatoly Gulyayev told Shoigu at the Defense Ministry meeting that work on the submarine was supposed to have been completed in 2011 and that, even before Monday's fire, only 80 percent of repairs had been carried out.

Regional emergency officials said radiation levels in the area of the submarine were within the normal range. Navy sources said that, in addition to two firefighting vessels, a ship that monitors radiation levels had been sent to the area, news agencies reported.

A blaze engulfed the atomic-powered Yekaterinburg at a shipyard in northwestern Russia in December 2011. At the time, official statements said there had been no nuclear missiles on board the sub, but a respected magazine later cited several unidentified sources as saying this was untrue.

In 2008, 20 people died aboard the submarine Nerpa when its fire extinguishing system went off, flooding compartments with deadly gas.

*Material from Reuters is included in this report.*

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