

Residents of Smog-Hit Russian Town Sue Over Health Complications

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Residents of a central Russian town plagued by air pollution are beginning to sue over health complications that they say are caused by toxic emissions from a nearby copper mine, local authorities have said.

The town of Sibai has been hit by thick smog since November, sparking protests and leading to the distribution of medical masks and the installation of two giant fans to [chase away](#) air pollution.

Related article: [Russian Town Installs Giant Fans to Disperse Smog](#)

“Some Sibai residents have begun to directly appeal to the courts with demands that the Uchalinsky ore processing plant compensate the damage done to their health,” Rady Khabirov, the governor of the republic of Bashkortostan, [told](#) the state-run RIA Novosti agency on Tuesday.

"They need to prove that their health was damaged as well as the correlation between the gas emissions and the incurred damage," he added.

"It will be up to the court to make a decision."

Local activists [blamed](#) the Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (UMMC) for what they called an attempt "to hide the true causes of the ecological tragedy" in a social media post Monday, to which they attached a letter that notified the authorities about a protest against air pollution planned for March 2.

They demanded that UMMC pay Sibai residents at least 500 million rubles (\$7.6 million) in restitution.

Khabirov, the region's governor, [apologized](#) to local residents on Monday after the town's mayor, Rustem Afzatov, criticized them for appealing to President Vladimir Putin over the town's air quality.

"I, for one, don't think that any harm has been done to my health," Afzatov was [cited](#) as saying by the Govorit Moskva radio station Tuesday, in response to the residents' lawsuits.

The Kremlin [pledged](#) last week to address Sibai's air pollution, while the presidential envoy to the Volga Federal District [vowed](#) to get rid of the problem by the end of March.

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