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Laka plays with, amongst others things, its information services, an important role in the Dutch anti-nuclear movement.

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Anti-nuclear resistance in Russia: problems, protests, reprisals





The Russian Social Ecological Union (RSEU)/ Friends of the Earth Russia is a non-governmental, non-profit and member based democratic organization, established in 1992. RSEU brings together environmental organizations and activists from across Russia. All RSEU activities are aimed at nature conservation, protection of health and the well-being of people in Russia and around the world.

In 2014, RSEU became the Russian member of Friends of the Earth International.

<http://rusecounion.ru/eng>

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Introduction

Rosatom is a Russian state-owned corporation which builds and operates nuclear power plants in Russia and globally. The state-run nuclear industry in Russia has a long history of nuclear crises, including the Kyshtym disaster in 1957 and Chernobyl in 1986. Yet Rosatom plans to build dozens of nuclear reactors in Russia, to export its deadly nuclear technologies to other countries, and then to import their hazardous nuclear waste.

This report is a collection of events and details about the resistance to Russian state nuclear corporation, Rosatom, and other activities that have led to the pollution of the environment and violation of human rights. Social and environmental conflicts created by Rosatom have been left unresolved for years, while at the same time, environmental defenders who have raised these issues, have consistently experienced reprisals.



Nuclear energy: failures and lies

Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear corporation, is heir to the Soviet atomic industry, despite all attempts to appear otherwise. Nuclear disasters still affect us and many of their long-term problems have been left unresolved. Upon review of the recent accidents that have occurred at nuclear facilities in Russia, it is clear that few improvements have been made. We see this again and again in the examples mentioned in this report.

- In the autumn of 2017, the *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)* discovered a concentration of the technogenic radionuclide ruthenium-106 in the atmosphere of several European countries.¹ A number of experts linked the ruthenium release to the *Mayak* plant in the Chelyabinsk Region^{2,3}, but *Rosatom* continues to deny this.
- On the 8th of August 2019, an explosion occurred during a test of a liquid rocket launcher at a marine training ground in Nenoksa Village of Arkhangelsk Region. The administration of the city of Severodvinsk, 30 km from the scene, reported an increase in radiation levels, but later denied the claim. The Ministry of Emergency registered an increase of 20 times (to 2 $\mu\text{Sv/h}$) around Severodvinsk⁴, while the Ministry of Defense reported the radiation level as normal. Only two days later, *Rosatom* reported that five employees were killed and three were injured at the test site. According to media reports, two employees of the Ministry of Defense were also killed and three were injured, and medical personnel who helped the victims were not informed about the risk of radiation exposure⁵.



The protest against the Kola NPP lifetime extension

Expired reactors

More than 70% of Russian nuclear reactors are outdated. They were developed in the 1970s and were designed to operate for only 30 years. The lifetimes of such reactors have been extended by twice the design limit⁶. Rosatom's strategy also includes a dangerous increase of the reactor's thermal power. Rostekhnadzor (Federal Environmental, Industrial and Nuclear Supervision Service) grants licenses for lifetime extensions without an environmental impact assessment and without public consultations.

Especially worrying are the lifetime extensions of reactor-types with design flaws. Chernobyl-type (RBMK) reactors in Leningrad, Smolensk and Kursk regions are still in operation after exceeding their lifetimes, as well as VVER-types, such as at the Kola nuclear power plant (NPP) in Murmansk region. Neither type has a sufficient protective shell to contain radioactivity in case of an accident or to protect the reactor from an external impact or influence.⁷

For many years, Murmansk regional environmental groups have opposed the ageing Kola NPP reactor's lifetime extension. They have participated in public hearings, have organised many demonstrations^{8 9 10}, appealed to and received support from the prosecutor's office¹¹, but this was all ignored by Rosatom.

Activists also called on the governor to shut down the old NPP, but environmental organisations were shut down instead. One such organisation is Kola Environmental Center (KEC) – listed as a Foreign Agent in 2017 – and was subject to two trials and fined 150,000 rubles¹². KEC was forced to close down as a legal entity in 2018, but has continued its environmental work as a public movement¹³. Another organisation in the region – Nature and Youth – made the decision to close down in order to avoid prosecution, but continues its work as an unregistered initiative.

Decommissioning problems

Most of the Russian nuclear power plants, despite their lifetime extensions, are approaching inevitable closure. Over the next 15 years, the NPP decommissioning process will take place. Currently, 36 power units are in operation at 11 NPPs in Russia, and 7 units have been shut down. While the fuel was removed from 5 of these units, the NPPs have not yet been decommissioned¹⁴. This process will lead to enormous amounts of nuclear waste. Moreover, sufficient funds for the decommissioning process have not yet been earmarked.¹⁵

- In 2018, after 45 years of operation, the first power unit of the Leningrad NPP was finally shut down. The second one scheduled for shutdown is in 2020, the third in 2025 and the fourth in 2026. However, decommissioning projects have not yet been clearly developed for the reactors. *Rosenergoatom*, *Rosatom's* subsidiary, will develop them in the years following the shutdowns.¹⁶
- The public organisation, *Green World*, has worked for many years in Sosnovy Bor, Leningrad Region, a city dominated by the nuclear industry and closed to outsiders. Since 1988, activists of the organisation have opposed dangerous nuclear projects in the Baltic Sea region¹⁷ and have provided the public with independent information on the environmental situation.¹⁸

Green World has consistently called for the decommissioning of Leningrad NPP and took an early lead in collecting and preparing information on how decommissioning should take place, studying the experience of other countries.¹⁹ They have paid particular attention to information transparency and to wide participation in decision-making, including, for example, former employees of the nuclear industry.²⁰

Rather than be met with cooperation, the organisation and its activists have, since the beginning, experienced pressure from the authorities and the dirty nuclear industry. Activists faced dismissal, lawsuits and even attempts on their lives.

In 2015, *Green World* was listed as a Foreign Agent and forced to close.²¹ In its place, another organisation was opened – *the Public Council of the South Coast of the Gulf of Finland*. Activists have continued their work as before under this new name.





Uranium mining protest

Uranium mining protest

In the Kurgan region, Rosatom’s subsidiary company, Dalur, has been mining uranium and the local communities fear an environmental disaster. In the summer of 2019, the state environmental appraisal revealed a discrepancy between Dalur’s documentation and the Russian legislation requirements, but the company started the deposit’s development anyway at the end of 2019.²²

- The ‘Dobrovolnoe’ uranium deposit is located in a floodplain of the Tobol river basin. This means that all the water that flows into the river will pass through the aquifer, flushing out radioactive and toxic compounds into the surrounding environment.²³
- Since 2017, Kurgan activists have been protesting against the development of the deposit. They have appealed to the authorities and begun protests. One of their videos, ‘Uranium is Death for Kurgan’, has already reached 50,000 views.²⁴ Several times, activists have tried to start a referendum and demand an independent environmental review, but so far, have received only refusals from the local officials.

In February 2018, Natalia Shulyatieva, the spouse of activist Andrey Shulyatiev and mother of three children, died after falling into a coma.²⁵ Activists believe this occurred in reaction to learning that Dalur had filed a lawsuit against her husband, accusing him of undermining the company’s reputation. The lawsuit was withdrawn following Shulyatieva’s death.²⁶

In March 2020, the Federal Security Service in the Kurgan Region initiated a criminal case against local eco-activist Lyubov Kudryashova for her ‘public justification of terrorism using the Internet’.²⁷ Activists attribute her persecution to her work at the *Public Monitoring Fund for the Environmental Condition and the Population Welfare* which she led back in 2017. The Foundation has repeatedly published information on the possible environmental damage resulting from Dalur’s mining activity.²⁸

Rosatom Importing uranium waste

In the fall of 2019, environmentalists revealed that radioactive and toxic waste (uranium hexafluoride, UF6) were being imported from Germany through the port of Amsterdam into Russia. This is the waste from the uranium enrichment process which will be sent to the Urals or Siberia and stored in containers above the ground. Thus, under the auspices of a commercial transaction, the German uranium-enriching enterprise, Urenco, avoids its nuclear waste problem, while Rosatom profits by taking the hazardous waste into Russia.

- In response to this transaction, the groups *Russian Social–Ecological Union*, *Ecodefense* and *Greenpeace Russia* called on Russian civil society to protest. More than 30 organisations and movements joined the common statement²⁹, and various demonstrations have taken place in Russia, as well as in Germany and the Netherlands.³⁰

As a result of protests, the question of importing radioactive waste was taken up by the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg³¹ and the transportation of the waste was delayed for three months.

However, in March 2020, when people in Russia were further restricted from protests during the Covid–19 virus quarantine, the import of radioactive waste was resumed through the port of the less populated town of Ust–Luga in Leningrad Region. Additional organisations and residents of the Leningrad region then decided to join the earlier anti–nuclear statement and protest.³²

- Following these protests, a number of activists have faced persecution. Like Sosnovy Bor, Novouralsk is a nuclear industry–dominated and closed city of Sverdlovsk region, and is the end destination of the transported uranium hexafluoride. The city has rarely seen protests before. In response to a series of one–person protests, authorities have initiated legal cases against three pensioners in the beginning of December 2019³³. Charges were later dismissed.

Another example is Rashid Alimov, an expert from *Greenpeace Russia*, who protested in the center of Saint Petersburg. Later the same day, two police officers together with six other people without uniform detained Alimov from in front of his house. He then faced charges and a substantial fine.³⁴ Charges were later dropped.

Environmental organisations that had previously opposed the import of uranium waste were listed as Foreign Agents. *Ecodefense* was the first of such, listed in 2014. In 2019, the pressure continued and the organisation’s leader, Alexandra Korolyova, was targeted.³⁵ Five criminal cases were initiated against her, which forced her to leave the country.³⁶





The Mayak plant: *Rosatom's* dirty face

The *Mayak* plant in the Chelyabinsk region is a nuclear waste reprocessing facility, arguably one of the places most negatively affected by the Russian nuclear industry. Firstly, radioactive waste was dumped into the Techa river from 1949 to 2004, which has been admitted by the company. According to subsequent reports by the local organisation *For Nature* however, the dumping has since been ongoing.³⁷ As a result, 35 villages around the river were evacuated and destroyed. Secondly, the explosion at the plant in 1957, known as the Kyshtym tragedy, is among the 20th century's worst nuclear accidents.³⁸

- One of the first organisations that raised the problem of radiation pollution in the Ural region was the *Movement for Nuclear Safety*, formed in 1989. During its work, the Movement was engaged in raising awareness, social protection of the affected population, and publishing dozens of reports.³⁹ After unprecedented pressure and persecution, the organisation's leader, Natalia Mironova, was forced to emigrate to the United States in 2013.

- Since 2000, another non-governmental organisation, *Planet of Hope*, has held thousands of consultations with affected citizens. Nadezhda Kutepova, a lawyer and head of the organisation, won more than 70 cases in defence of *Mayak* victims, including 2 cases in the European Court of Human Rights⁴⁰. However, some important cases have still not been resolved. These include 2nd generation victims, cases involving pregnant women who were affected during liquidation, as well as the many schoolchildren of Tatarskaya Karabolka village who were sent to harvest the contaminated crop after the accident.⁴¹

The state and *Rosatom* have reacted against the actions of Nadezhda Kutepova, persecuting both her and *Planet of Hope*. The organisation survived arbitrary inspections in 2004 and 2009, but was labelled a Foreign Agent in 2015 and closed in 2018.⁴² After being accused of 'industrial espionage' under the threat of criminal prosecution, Nadezhda was forced to flee the country with her children. She nevertheless continues her struggle to bring justice for the victims of *Mayak*.

- Since 2002, the public foundation *For Nature* has been disputing nuclear activity in the region. The organisation appealed to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on the import of spent nuclear fuel from the Paks nuclear power plant in Hungary. The court declared the Governmental Decree to be invalid, thus preventing the import of 370 tons of Hungarian radioactive waste.⁴³

In March 2015, *For Nature* was also listed as a Foreign Agent and fined.⁴⁴ In 2016, the court shut down the organisation.⁴⁵ In its place, a social movement of the same name was formed, and continues to help the South Ural communities.⁴⁶

Struggle against nuclear repository

In the city of Krasnoyarsk, *Rosatom* plans to build a national repository for high-level radioactive waste. A site has been selected on the banks of Siberia's largest river, the Yenisei, only 40 km from the city. Environmental activists consider this project, if implemented, to be a crime against future generations and violates numerous Russian laws. Activists are also concerned that waste from Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria (and in the future from Belarus, Turkey, Bangladesh, and other countries) could be transported there as well.⁴⁷

- The community is understandably outraged, as no one wants to live in the world's nuclear dump. Since 2013, for more than 7 years, the people of Krasnoyarsk have been protesting. To date, more than 146,000 people have signed the petition to the President of the Russian Federation protesting against the construction of this federal nuclear repository.⁴⁸

Most of the producing nuclear power plants are located in the European part of Russia, but the waste is going to be sent for 'the rest of its lifetime' to Siberia. Local activists refer to this, with good reason, as *Rosatom's* "nuclear colonisation" of Siberia.⁴⁹

- In 2016, Fedor Maryasov, an independent journalist and leader of the protest, was accused of inciting hatred against 'nuclear industry workers' as a social group. A criminal case was initiated under the article on extremism.⁵⁰ The basis for this accusation was 125 publications on social networks and the press about nuclear topics. The activist's apartment was searched and his computer seized, along with a printed report on *Rosatom's* activities in the Krasnoyarsk region.⁵¹

The federal security service also issued Maryasov an official warning for treason. Only wide publicity in the media and the active support of human rights lawyers has thus far prevented further criminal prosecution of the activist.

Drawing by Anatoly Samarin





Protest against the 'death plants'

Rosatom's 'death plants'

At the end of January 2019, *RosRAO*, a structure of *Rosatom*, began the project of 're-profiling' the four former plants in the Kurgan, Kirov, Saratov regions and the Republic of Udmurtia, converting facilities used to destroy chemical weapons into facilities for the disposal of hazardous waste. Later, *RosRAO* was even hypocritically rebranded the *Federal Environmental Operator*.

- In all four regions, *RosRAO* presented scant documentation that failed to meet the requirements of Russian legislation. Until now, no information has been provided regarding the technologies proposed for use at the facilities. Furthermore, no information has yet to be given about either the source of the waste or its eventual destination. These plans have been seriously criticised by environmentalists.⁵²

- In the town of Gorniy in the Saratov Region, *RosRAO* plans to process 344 types of hazardous waste. It is already known that more than 200 of these types of waste require incineration. Of these, the combustion of more than 65 types inevitably leads to the formation of dioxins.⁵³

Activist groups have already begun organising in the regions around the plants and are trying to challenge these new initiatives of *Rosatom*. Activists from different regions have already united in the interregional movement 'No to Death Plants'.⁵⁴ A petition in the Vyatka region has already gathered nearly 57,000 signatures.⁵⁵

Similar to other cases of *Rosatom*-related protesting, the Kirov authorities have not allowed public demonstrations at any of the 31 proposed sites.⁵⁶

A road through a radioactive graveyard

Many hazardous radiation facilities across Russia are abandoned and require restoration. An example of this is the radioactive waste dump of the *Moscow Polymetal Plant*.⁵⁷ Since the 1930s, the *Moscow Polymetal Plant* has processed monazite, containing thorium, uranium, and radium. Until 1972, the plant disposed of its tailings on the banks of the Moscow River. Eventually, the waste dump was abandoned and has since become a radioactive hillslope. Today, in place of the *Moscow Polymetal Plant* stands the headquarters of *Fuel Company TVEL*, a subsidiary of *Rosatom*, while the company *Radon*, another subsidiary of *Rosatom*, excavates 10–15 cubic meters of waste from the hillslope annually. Given that 15,000 cubic meters of waste remain, at this rate it would take more than 1000 years to remove all of the buried waste.

- At the public hearings in the Spring of 2019, a city development plan indicated that an auto-bridge would pass in close proximity to the waste burial site. When asked what would happen to the radioactive waste, authorities replied that there is no radiation in the area.

Residents and activists of the region have conducted dozens of public environmental inspections of the radioactive hillslope. Among the residents and activists, they have organised a citizen watch group called 'Slope Defense' to monitor the hillslope. They have also installed signs to caution the public about radiation danger.⁵⁸ These actions have since attracted public attention.

Several roundtables were held to engage Moscow authorities in discussions, as well as within the State Duma⁵⁹ and in the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation⁶⁰, but representatives never came to these meetings. On the night of 19 March 2020, the authorities responded: the lookout post for 'Slope Defense' was demolished⁶¹ and 63 community members were detained by the police.

Clean sand, which does not radiate, has since been poured over the pollution site.⁶² This means the company can build on top of the buried danger, hiding the problem but not solving it. Meanwhile, residents keep documenting violations and continue their struggle.



Protest against the construction on the waste dump

Conclusion: nuclear power is a problem, not a solution

Despite the nightmare described above, *Rosatom* is trying to convince us of the nuclear industry's purity and purported carbon neutrality. In addition, *Rosatom* is building nuclear plants abroad using money from the Russian Federation's budget. Nuclear not only won't save our climate, but will continue to create even more insoluble problems of radioactive waste for thousands of years.

We demand that:

- Russia must abandon all further development of nuclear energy.
- Current nuclear power plants should be closed and decommissioned as soon as possible.
- Current funds from the development of nuclear energy should be redirected to the development of local renewable energy sources, to the restoration of contaminated territories and as support for those affected by the activities of the nuclear industry.
- The problem of nuclear waste should be discussed widely, openly and inclusively, with the participation of all interested parties, and decisions should be made democratically, taking into account the principles of environmental justice.
- Pressure on all activists, including environmental defenders and defenders of victims' rights, should cease immediately.
- And finally, *Rosatom* should be held responsible for environmental pollution and violation of human rights.

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