

Fuel depot blaze in Ukraine under control; three firemen missing

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A massive fire at a Ukrainian fuel depot killed five people on Tuesday, officials said, including three firemen who went missing after the flames triggered a powerful explosion.

The fire burned overnight and by morning had spread to at least 16 tanks, most of them storing petrol. That sent a pall of black smoke over the area around the depot near Vasylkiv, 30 km (19 miles) from Kiev. The depot's owners said they suspected arson.

"Firemen have the situation ... under total control," top security official Oleksander Turchynov said in a statement.

There was no longer any threat of the blaze spreading and emergency services were putting out remaining fires in the depot, he said.

Entire oil tanks were consumed in the flames, which emergency services had feared would spread to another fuel depot nearby. Weapons and equipment were removed from a neighbouring military base to a place of safety.

"The crisis will be resolved entirely within the next 12 hours," Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said in televised comments.

The bodies of three firemen, unaccounted for after the explosion ripped through the area as they battled the fire, had been found, Avakov said. Two other people died and several others were injured, the emergency services said.

Sixty-two fire-fighting units and three trains delivering water and supplies have been mobilised, emergency services said.

Rescuers had evacuated people from within a two-kilometre radius of the fire, Turchynov said.

Interior Ministry official Zoryan Shkiryak said police were investigating three possible causes of the fire -- "violations of fuel storage regulations, technical malfunctions or arson".

The owners of the depot, BRSM-Nafta, said in a statement they believed the fire was the result of an arson attack aimed at damaging its business.

Of the 16 fuel tanks affected, eight had a capacity of 900 cubic metres, while the rest were smaller in volume, the emergency ministry said. The overall capacity of the depot is 25,000 cubic metres.

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