

Russia's only carrier, damaged in shipyard accident, now on fire

Enlarge / MURMANSK, RUSSIA – DECEMBER 12, 2019: A fire has broken out aboard the Project 11435 aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov of the Russian Northern Fleet. Admiral Kuznetsov is the only aircraft carrier of the Russian Navy. Lev Fedoseyev/TASS

TASS / Lev Fedosev

reader comments

344 with 182 posters participating

Share this story

The Admiral Kuznetsov, Russia's only aircraft carrier, caught fire today during repairs in Murmansk. While officials of the shipyard said that no shipyard workers were injured, Russia's TASS news service reports that at least 12 people (likely Kuznetsov sailors) were injured, some critically. In addition, three people, possibly including the third-rank captain in charge of the ship's repairs, are unaccounted for.

The Kuznetsov has had a long string of bad luck, experiencing fires at sea, oil spills, and landing deck accidents—including a snapped arresting wire that caused a landing Sukhoi Su-33 fighter to roll off the end of the deck and into the ocean. Its boilers belched black smoke during the ship's transit to Syria in 2016, and it had to be towed back home after breaking down during its return in 2017. Then last year, as it was undergoing repairs in a floating drydock in Murmansk's Shipyard 82, the drydock sank and a crane on the drydock

slammed into the Kuznetsov, leaving a gash in the ship's hull. It looked like completion of repairs might be put off indefinitely because repair of the drydock would take over a year, and the budget for repairs had been slashed.

The fire was caused when sparks from welding work near one of the ship's electrical distribution compartments set a cable on fire. The fire spread through the wiring throughout compartments of the lower deck of the ship, eventually involving 120 square meters (1,300 square feet) of the ship's spaces.

In total, 12 victims were delivered to hospitals, 10 of them were saved during the fire. One is assessed as serious, and one suffered a head injury. Most received poisoning from combustion products, according to a report from TASS.

Shipboard firefighting, even in port, is a grim and hellish undertaking. Lack of ventilation, darkness, and the toxic smoke released by burning electrical wiring, oil, paint, and equipment make fighting fires aboard a ship particularly difficult, requiring frequent relief of those fighting the fires due to the stress and limits on breathing apparatuses. Those who have served in any navy afloat can attest to how terrifying even the thought of a mass conflagration aboard a ship is, even when pier-side.

<https://arstechnica.com/?p=1631867>