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# Nuclear submarine emergency in Barents Sea

Russian nuclear powered submarine is lying at the seabed of the Barents Sea. Preliminary analysis shows that the rescue operation can be complicated.

Thomas Nilsen, and Igor Kudrik,  
2000.08.14 09:03

Russian news agencies reported Monday with a reference to the press centre of the Russian Navy that during military exercise in the Barents Sea Oscar-II class cruise missile nuclear powered submarine, Kursk, would take contact with Northern Fleet Operative Centre at the scheduled time.

### Facts about Oscar-II

Read Bellona facts about the Oscar-II class submarines in the Northern Fleet. [Facts about Oscar-II](#)

The location of the submarine was established later and it was found out that the submarine is lying at the seabed. The Northern Fleet sent a rescue party to the area of accident. Communication was established with the crew. Vyacheslav Popov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Fleet, leads the operation.

The accident apparently occurred on Sunday, 13 August, when the Northern Fleet finished a four-day extensive exercise in the Barents Sea which involved around 30 surface vessels and submarines as well as aviation.

The press centre of the Russian Navy says the reactor installation is shut down and the radiation levels are within norms. The press centre also insists the submarine carried no nuclear weapon.

Bellona's expert Aleksandr Nikitin, retired submarine officer, says that the fact that submarine is at the seabed means the reactor installation malfunctioned and was shut down.

The depth in the Barents Sea is around 200-400 meters. Nikitin says that if the submarine is lying at the depth of more than 100 meters, it is very complicated to use the ballast tanks in order to surface, especially when the power installation is out of operation. It is also complicated to rescue 130 crewmen trapped inside the submarine. Oscar-II class submarines are not equipped with rescue capsules to

Oscar-II class submarines are not equipped with rescue capsules to take the crew to surface. The Northern Fleet will apparently have to use deep going rescue submarine to save the crew.

The submarine is the newest of the Oscar-II class in the Northern Fleet, was put into service in December 1994. The submarine has its home base in Zapadnaya Litsa at the Kola Peninsula. Kursk has two nuclear powered reactors, and is capable of carrying a maximum of 24 nuclear cruise missiles.

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