

Russia fires top space official over launch failures

September 3 2012

Russian President Vladimir Putin has fired the chief of a key state-run aerospace bureau following several launch failures, the Kremlin said Monday.

The head of the Khrunichev space centre, Vladimir Nesterov, has been relieved of his duties, said a decree dated August 31 and published on the Kremlin website Monday.

Nesterov, 63, had been the general director of Khrunichev State Research and Production Space Centre since 2005. The Moscow-based establishment is Russia's largest aerospace company, which produces and launches the [Proton rocket](#).

Russia's Prime Minister [Dmitry Medvedev](#) last month called on space officials to answer for losing 10 satellites in one-and-a-half years, saying at a government meeting that the string of failures "weakens the reputation of Russia as a leading space nation."

Nesterov reportedly asked to be allowed to resign following the August 14 meeting.

In Russia's most recent space failure, two satellites were lost after the unsuccessful launch of a Proton-M rocket on August 6, which missed the correct orbit. The [telecommunications satellites](#)—the Russian Express-MD2 and the Indonesian Telkom-3—never made contact.

A commission later found a problem with Briz-M, the upper-stage used with the Proton-M rocket, and ordered inspections on the entire Briz-M production line, putting future launches on hold.

Medvedev said the loss "threw billions of rubles into the wind".

Russia's space programme has been beset by a litany of technical problems which have resulted in the loss of a half-dozen satellites and vehicles over the past year, including a Progress cargo vessel bound for the [International Space Station](#).

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