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Russia:

Vessels

Possibly Containing Chemical Weapons Found on Baltic Seabed

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KALININGRAD, June 8 (Itar-Tass) -- Four ships sunk after the Second World War were discovered on the Baltic seabed. The ships that have not yet been surveyed may contain chemical weapons, Vadim Paka, the deputy director of the Shirshov Oceanology Institute for Atlantics in Kaliningrad, told Itar-Tass on Thursday.

He said the ships had been discovered during an expedition of the Professor Shtokman research vessel in the framework of the programme of Russia's Ministry for Emergency Situations. Two submerged vessels are on the seabed east of the Danish Bornholm Island, and two other in Russian territorial waters.

"The ships should be promptly surveyed for potentially hazardous objects, including chemical weapons," Paka said. According to the Helsinki Intergovernmental Commission for Protection of the Baltic, over 32,000 tonnes of chemical weapons are concentrated in a relatively small area. "There are yet no signs of sizable issuing of toxic substances into water," Paka said.

Meanwhile, Paka holds, "There is a need to step up the survey in the Baltic, first of all, in the areas of massive dumping of chemical weapons, and an international expedition should be arranged for the purpose." So far the work conducted by Russian scientists and specialists is deterred by lack of financing.

[< back](#)

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