

Denmark incinerates minks culled over virus fears

May 13 2021



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Denmark on Thursday kicked off the grisly task of unearthing and incinerating minks that were hastily buried after a mass culling sparked

by fears of a mutated coronavirus strain, authorities said.

All 15 million of Denmark's minks were killed last year after it emerged they were carrying a virus strain that experts feared could avert vaccines.

Some were buried in November in two mass graves in west Denmark, sparking fears that their decomposing carcasses could pollute surrounding areas.

The government called on them to be dug up and incinerated once the risk of contagion had subsided.

On Thursday, teams started digging up some of the 13,000 tonnes (29 million pounds) of mink carcasses due to be unearthed, which were then transported to the nearby Maabjerg Energy Center (MEC) for incineration.

"I am relieved to see how the whole thing is going according to plan," agriculture minister Rasmus Prehn said in a post to Twitter.

The MEC warned that a foul odour from the carcasses may emanate in the area as they are transported and unloaded, but that burning them at a high temperature should eliminate the smell once they reach the incinerators.

Denmark was the world's largest exporter of mink fur before it culled its entire mink population last year after some were found to be carrying a mutated coronavirus variant.

Health authorities worried that vaccines may not work against the so-called Cluster 5 variant, which was declared wiped out in November.

The government banned [mink](#) breeding until January 2022, but it has

come under fire for its culling program.

Once the mass gassing programme had already begun, a [court challenge](#) to the order found that the executive's decision had no legal basis, leading to the resignation of the previous agriculture minister.

Adding to the scandal, it was later revealed that the disposal of the dead animals could cause phosphorus and nitrogen to be released into the soil surrounding mass graves due to the [decomposition process](#).

In one grim turn of events, one [mass grave](#) saw dead minks that had been buried too shallow rising out of the ground.

Mink are the only animal confirmed to be capable both of contracting the strain and of passing it to humans.

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Citation: Denmark incinerates minks culled over virus fears (2021, May 13) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-05-denmark-incinerates-minks-culled-virus.html>

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