

Home Rebuilding Starts

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August 09, 2010



Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov looking at models of new homes in the village of Beloomut on Friday. **Denis Sinyakov**

Construction on new houses for those who have lost their homes because of wildfires has started in all regions that have fallen victim to the blazes, the Regional Development Ministry said Monday.

The announcement came after Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin said last week that preparation for construction should begin no later than Monday.

"I'd like to warn at once that the last deadline for ... beginning to clear and prepare the sites is Aug. 9," he said at a meeting with regional authorities Friday, adding that extension on these terms "would be perceived as a failure to fulfill obligations."

The government has staked out a very high-profile position of censure toward officials seen as not doing enough in response to the blazes, with President Dmitry Medvedev dismissing senior military officials who failed to prevent a wildfire from ravaging a Navy base and Prime

Minister Vladimir Putin threatening repercussions for municipal officials who failed to defend their towns.

So far, about 6.5 billion rubles (\$217 million) has been allocated to compensate for lost property and to rebuild 1,945 homes in 14 areas: the Belgorod, Ivanovo, Kirov, Lipetsk, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Ryazan, Tambov, Tula, Ulyanovsk, Vladimir and Voronezh regions, as well as the republics of Mordovia and Tatarstan.

Most regions plan to start laying new foundations by Aug. 25 and are confident that they will meet Putin's Nov. 1 deadline to finish construction on the houses.

"We've already started laying foundations," said Tatyana Yukhmanova, a spokeswoman for the Nizhny Novgorod region.

The government of the Voronezh region began to clear the construction sites on Aug. 3 and will start construction on Wednesday, said Andrei Chervakov, the regional government's spokesman.

Chervakov said some construction was being delayed because victims had not yet decided whether to accept the new house or receive monetary compensation.

"Most people prefer construction of a new house. It's not that easy to build [a home] by oneself. And it's easier when [construction] is centralized and there's an opportunity to complete it by the time it becomes cold," he said, adding that the deadline to announce the decision on the type of compensation is Aug. 11.

The Nizhny Novgorod region has seen the most houses destroyed, with at least 798 homes lost, while the Ryazan and Voronezh regions were also hit hard, losing at least 259 and 240 homes, respectively.

Meanwhile, web cameras set up at construction sites on Putin's order began broadcasting on Friday, but the prime minister is dissatisfied with their operation.

Putin said Monday that the "picture" broadcast by the cameras "is not very good so far" and that specialists should be called in to fix the problem.

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