The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Anti-Corruption Cameras Show Empty Fields

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August 12, 2010



Webcam feeds from the Voronezh region...

The Regional Development Ministry on Thursday slammed local officials for the way they set up web cameras to monitor construction of new homes for victims of wildfires, saying they show empty fields, not construction work.

Deputy Regional Development Minister Konstantin Korolevsky said Thursday that the live feeds, which Prime Minister Vladimir Putin promised to track personally, do not show the actual work done so far.

"Personally make sure the cameras are pointed to the place where [construction] work is being done, not just at a field opposite these sites," Korolevsky said at a meeting with heads of the regions ravaged by wildfires.

The cameras, most of which went online last Friday, largely showed empty lots or a few

individuals milling around. By Thursday afternoon, many regions had construction equipment or even buildings in the works.

Korolevsky also said the ministry would be tracking down any discrepancies between construction plans presented by the regions and the actual buildings being built.

"It doesn't always look like construction work is really progressing, and there's no impression that they really meet the plan," Korolevsky said. “The matter will be closely overseen.”

Putin said Monday that he was dissatisfied with the picture from surveillance cameras. The live feed "is not very good so far," he said, adding that specialists should be called in to fix the problem.

On Thursday, the images from the web cameras were several times larger, although their quality had not noticeably improved.

Surveillance cameras were set at construction sites in 11 regions on Putin's orders and are broadcasting footage to Putin's office and apartment, as well as the government's web site.

Opposition leader Ilya Yashin said he thought that they were introduced solely to prevent theft. "The web cameras are there so that local workers do not steal construction materials," he told The Moscow Times on Thursday.

Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin said Monday that construction of new houses had already started in all regions that have fallen victim to blazes.

Most regions promise to meet Putin's Nov. 1 deadline for construction.

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