

WWF Unveils Eco Office Plans

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The future Moscow headquarters of the World Wildlife Fund will be saving significant money on energy and water.

The World Wildlife Fund is to turn its central Moscow headquarters into a showcase for "green construction" in a bid to kick-start a growing wave of interest in green building.

The 2.5 million euro (\$3.4 million) renovation will see the three-story 19th-century house in Moscow's Taganka district encased in a glass and wood facade, fitted with solar panels and stuffed with insulation made of recycled glass to make it what companies are calling the capital's first "eco house."

"We're hoping to get experimental status for this project and, based on that, see what regulations need to be changed to make sure this experiment becomes normal practice," said WWF Russia director Igor Chestin at a kickoff ceremony at the French Embassy.

Construction is scheduled to start in the spring and will last a year, but the exact start date is dependent on the Moscow government signing off on the necessary legal documents.

Chestin said the city government had been "supportive," and expected any delays to be administrative.

The revamped house is designed to be 11 times more energy efficient than a typical office building, halve water consumption and slash lighting costs by 35 percent.

While Russia has a long-established eco-construction movement centered on building environmentally friendly dachas, this is the first time a commercial building in the city center will have been renovated so radically.

The renovation will cost about 2.5 million euros, "about normal in Moscow for 1,200 square meters," Chestin told The Moscow Times.

But he and his colleague Alexander Korolyov, a project manager from Proma Estate, which is handling the renovation, conceded that the price would have been "30 to 40 percent higher" without generous contributions by French, German and Russian partner companies — putting the real financial outlay of green office renovation as high as 3.5 million euros.

The project leaders hope that one result of the project will be to prod the government to introduce the same kind of "stick and carrot" legislation that has boosted the green construction business in Europe, where environmentally friendly construction is only 10 to 15 percent more costly than traditional methods.

"There are two things driving the market: demand is growing, and there's a sense that the government has finally started to take notice," said Guy Eames, co-founder and chief executive of the Green Building Council Russia, an umbrella group that includes several companies working on WWF's house.

A 2009 federal law on energy efficiency introduced some requirements, and the government has also ordered new buildings for the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics to conform to international energy efficiency standards.

In 2010, a 14-story Moscow office building and a bearing factory in the Tver region became the first buildings in Russia to win internationally recognized green construction certifications.

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