

Government Plans Target Mortality Rate

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If the plans work, graveside memorial gatherings should not increase. **Igor Tabakov**

The government said Wednesday that 14,000 people died because of a record heat wave last summer, prompting "the country's leading scientists" to look for ways to mitigate the effect of extreme climatic conditions on the mortality rate.

The drafting of a lifesaving plan for extremely hot and cold weather, ordered by the Health and Social Development Ministry, is just part of a broader effort by the authorities to stabilize the country's population at 142 million people by 2015, a source in the Cabinet said.

The death toll, as announced by the source, appears to be the first official tally of how many people perished during the scorching months of July and August. The measures to prevent this in the future, the source indicated, include installation of air conditioners in public institutions such as hospitals — or making sure that they have enough heating capacity in the event of a severe cold snap.

The government plans to prevent a decline in population mostly by further reducing

the mortality rate in the next five years, the source told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity prior to Thursday's Presidium discussion on the national demographic policy through 2015. The policy includes measures to disperse high-tech medical assistance, introduce better work safety rules and make sure that there are more ambulances to rush victims of road accidents to hospitals, another government source said at the briefing.

"We don't look worse than most of Europe in terms of the birth rate," he said. "In terms of the mortality rate, we lag behind considerably."

Concerning the birth rate, which has been on the rise, awarding a "maternity capital" bonus to women for each birth beyond the first child — an amount that now equals 365,000 rubles (\$12,500) — will remain a key incentive. But the number of women of fertile age will go down starting in 2013, creating an additional challenge, the second source said. He ruled out greater financial encouragement to give birth, saying alternative measures would include free professional training courses for women who take maternity leaves.

The government recorded no decline in the birth rate throughout the economic crisis so far, the source said.

Russia had 141.9 million people as of the start of last year, the latest available statistics.

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