

Defense Ministry Picketed Over Housing

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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An ex-Navy officer holding a sign with a mock Defense Ministry stamp saying “Housing denied” at the ministry. **Mikhail Metzel**

Ten military officers picketed the Defense Ministry on Monday, claiming that the ministry has failed to provide apartments to them and 200,000 of their colleagues.

According to a 1998 law, officers who have served at least 10 years in the armed forces are entitled to a state-provided apartment within three months of applying for it — and they cannot be fired before that housing is provided.

Many officers have been waiting 20 years for their apartments, said Sergei Yermolenko, one of the officers at the protest.

Yermolenko, a former lieutenant-colonel in the Strategic Missile Troops, claimed he has been waiting for an apartment since 1999. In 2005, he was fired "illegally," he said, to negate the housing obligation. Late last year, many officers were denied access to their applications' status, he said.

The ministry has been suspending officers who had wanted to resign, and is paying them monthly benefits until they get an apartment. But it wants to cancel the payments, Yermolenko said.

"We want the Defense Ministry to tell all military officers what apartments they will be provided and when," and what is happening with their applications, Yermolenko said.

"The information is closed. People are at a loss," he said.

Previously, every military unit had its own housing commission. But in November, the Defense Ministry eliminated those agencies in favor of one department at the ministry. That made it much more difficult for officers to get information about their applications, Yermolenko said.

Officers protested the reform in May — and again in September.

Several thousand officers have sent collective complaints to the president, prime minister and defense minister since May, but no reply has come, the officers said. The state is legally obligated to answer within 30 days.

An inquiry submitted to the Defense Ministry early Monday afternoon went unanswered.

The government has earmarked a total of 168.3 billion rubles (\$5.3 billion) to provide housing to military officers in 2011-13, according to a statement on the Finance Ministry's [web site](#).

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