

# April Construction Safety Record Dismal

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A worker at a construction site using a rope to secure himself while balanced precariously on a high perch. **Andrei Makhonin**

April is turning out to be a catastrophic and tragic month for construction in Moscow, and the spate of fatal accidents and major catastrophes is raising questions about the capital's building oversight.

On Monday, a five-story building across the street from the Federal Security Service headquarters caught fire during renovation work, causing the evacuation of 20 people from a rooftop, RIA-Novosti reported. Firefighters put out the blaze Monday evening after a three-hour fight, and no injuries were immediately reported.

Last Tuesday, a six-story building under construction at a site just southeast of the Garden Ring collapsed into a jumble of metal, killing at least one person and causing 10 others to be hospitalized.

On April 3 a fire broke out inside metal shacks in southwest Moscow that housed Tajik

warehouse employees, killing 18 of them. A day earlier, an inferno on the 67th floor of the Vostok tower under construction in the Moskva-City business district took four hours and three water-ferrying helicopters for firefighters to extinguish it.

In addition, Interfax and Life News are reporting that a German engineer died Friday at a building site in western Moscow, saying he suffered a fatal fall at a car dealership under construction and that other workers discovered his body later that morning.

The Russian construction company listed on the man's Facebook page couldn't confirm the death, saying its spokeswoman wasn't available Monday. The German Embassy in Moscow also didn't have information about the man on Monday.

There are "a lot of accidents" in all segments of construction, real estate consultant Yana Kuzina said, including in the office and residential segments.

"There are bribes in the construction industry, and sometimes some rules are broken," said Kuzina, who headed the strategic consulting and valuation department for a major real estate firm for about 10 years.

"Everybody tries to save money when doing construction," she said.

In e-mailed comments, Moscow's construction supervision department said there were 18,000 reports of employee safety and building safety violations among construction companies in Moscow in 2011. The department, called Stroinadzor, said it took "tougher measures" against violators last year and assessed 22 million rubles (\$744,000) in fines, or 2.6 times the amount assessed in 2010.

That's despite the fact that the violations actually decreased by about 10 percent compared with 2010, Stroinadzor said.

Gennady Khokhlov, chief engineer for the project management department at real estate consulting firm CBRE, said he believes that construction regulations in the capital "are sufficiently detailed" and can eliminate problems if they are followed in full.

"Unfortunately, it isn't 100 percent of the companies that follow" the rules, but most of the builders do, he believes.

"It's a fact of life," he said in an interview. "Sometimes there are victims."

As head of Knight Frank's urban residential sales for Moscow, Olga Tarakanova tours luxury apartment buildings. She sees workers in those buildings — which are built by the largest Russian developers or by foreign firms — diligently wearing safety equipment and wearing protective gear, she said.

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