

Town's Residents 'Beggars in an Instant'

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KRYMSK, Krasnodar Region — It seemed there was nothing but water in the early hours of Saturday, when residents say a 7-meter-high wave came crashing down on the Black Sea town of Krymsk, flooding a neat row of new brick houses where families lay sleeping.

In the hours that followed, the streets of Krymsk turned into raging torrents that swept along debris and drowned animals and floodwaters filled some homes to the ceiling in this town of 57,000.

About 150 people have been killed in the deluge in Krymsk. Most of the dead were elderly people, caught unaware as they slept and drowned along with pets and livestock.

Now there is almost no water to be had, and the town is without power and gas.

"It's not so bad without power, which can be restored," said Zarzam Asatryan, who came to his neighborhood of Krymsk to help his brother salvage what was left of his home after the flood. "Without water we can't even clean up."

Cars stood parked along the street with their doors wide open and their seats next to them

on the ground, removed by their owners to let the soaked upholstery dry out. A drowned dog lay by a fallen walnut tree, still wearing its collar.

"We were lying there asleep when the water came out of nowhere at 2 a.m., and right away it was knee-deep," said Berezhnoi, a cement factory worker.

"We barely managed to pull the children out. The dogs drowned. All our documents were lost — the car registration, work records, my army draft card. Everything was washed away — the furniture, the appliances. And the house is destroyed."

In front of each fence was a mound of ruined possessions and mud carried out of the home beyond. Unlike a wooden dwelling at one end of the street, the walls of the brick homes remained standing, even if the roofs looked ready to cave in.

"It is too dangerous to sleep here," Asatryan said.

In the center of Krymsk, the Emergency Situations Ministry had set up a tent camp to house people flooded out of their homes, thousands of people throughout the affected coastal areas.

A man with a bullhorn wandered through residential areas, directing residents to a local school to sign up for immediate payouts of 10,000 rubles (\$300) promised by President Vladimir Putin to each victim to cover urgent needs.

"We became beggars in an instant," pensioner Yelena Chuboreva said. "They are telling us to go sign up for 10,000 rubles' compensation because we've lost the shirt off our backs."

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