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Call Center to Improve Emergency Services

By Irina Filatova

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Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov

The government plans to launch an integrated emergency call center, as the tragedy in flood-ravaged Krymsk has highlighted the need to improve the quality of response from rescue services, Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov said Thursday.

The center will be built with about 20 billion rubles ($623 million) in state and private investment.

The Emergency Situations Ministry will draft a bill over the next two to three weeks to create a center with a single telephone number, 112, for responses to all emergencies, including ambulance, police, firefighting and gas, Puchkov told reporters after the government meeting.

The idea is simple, Puchkov said. Instead of having to know the telephone numbers of all

the various emergency services, people can dial 112 in an emergency to contact the integrated call center, and an operator will assign an agency to take charge of the problem.

Implementing the initiative will allow for "improving the quality of response" from all emergency services and cut the time needed for them to react, Puchkov said.

The service will be launched by 2015 across the entire territory of Russia. The minister said it had already proved effective in places where it is being tested, including the Kursk region and the republic of Tatarstan.

The service will be available to foreigners as well because operators will be able to reply in three foreign languages: English, German and French. Puchkov said the list could include other languages in the future.

He said financing for the project, totaling 20 billion rubles, would be provided by the federal budget, regional budgets and telecommunications operators, with 30 percent of that sum to be spent in 2012 and 2013.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said at the government meeting that the tragedy in Krymsk shows that the country needs to develop its emergency services.

He also promised that the government would provide about 300 million rubles from the federal budget to compensate those who suffered in the flood, in addition to the 3.8 billion rubles already set aside for that purpose.

Puchkov said more than 34,000 people had already received compensation.

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