

Krymsk Flood Victims Asked to Return Compensation Funds

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Social Development Minister for the Krasnodar region Yelena Ilchenko said Monday that more than 161 families in Krymsk that received payouts to repair their homes ravaged by last year's flooding have been asked to return over 30 million rubles (\$1 million) of those funds.

Mistakes were made in the process of issuing payouts, she said, because multiple agencies were handling the matter, thus using various databases.

“Residents began receiving notifications of the need to return the funds as early as September. All told, 71 people received such notifications because their documentation indicated a larger floor area than was actually flooded.

For 65 people, their homes fell into the category of requiring complete overhaul, but later the court deemed their homes damaged. In connection with that, the measure of compensation was changed,” Ilchenko said, Interfax reported.

In addition, there were certain cases where homes were officially registered as uninhabited, thus not being eligible for repairs.

The minister's statement comes on the heels of an NTV report on Jan. 26 that said funds were meant to be given only for the flooded floor space, not for the entire home, and now families that mistakenly received more than that were being asked to return the difference. According to NTV, 90 of the families have agreed to return the money. The remaining families said they were prepared to go to court over the matter.

The Krasnodar regional prosecutor posted a statement on Sunday stating that it was looking into the legality of the demands for repayment.

In most cases, however, the demands are fully legal, RIA-Novosti reported, citing a source in law enforcement. In some cases, the families received donations only to later be awarded new housing in court.

"In such cases the officials are acting fully reasonably by asking to return the money donated for repairs. And, more than that, the people themselves understand that, and are even coming out with these offers to return the money themselves," the source said.

More than 170 people died in the flooding, which destroyed thousands of homes in Krymsk in July. The tragedy also provoked strong criticism of local authorities, with many accusing them of failing to act quickly enough to warn residents of the impending disaster.

The total paid out to victims amounted to 4 billion rubles (\$133 million).

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