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Dogs and Horses to Patrol Sochi Olympics

By Allison Quinn

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The Emergency Situations Ministry is setting up a special training center in Sochi for a horse-and-canine rescue unit that will patrol the 2014 Winter Olympics and assist in search-and-rescue operations in the future.

The center will open in March in the village of Akhshtyr, in the Adler district, ministry spokeswoman Irina Rossius told journalists Friday, Interfax reported.

Construction of the center was first reported in December 2011, when a ministry spokesman told RIA-Novosti that the center would be completed by November 2012.

According to that report, the center will have a closed riding hall, 20 horses, a kennel for 10 dogs and an administrative building. Its construction costs would total 250 million rubles ($8.3 million), the report said.

The center is one of many efforts by the ministry to improve rescue operations and boost security in time for the Sochi Games.

Rossius said one major goal is to reduce the response time of rescue workers dispatched to incidents in the areas where the Olympics will be held.

More than 1,400 rescue workers will be on duty for the Olympic Games, with 550 to patrol in the mountains, 440 along the coast and more than 420 in Sochi proper. In addition, 136 fire prevention inspectors will be on duty at all times.

Staffers in the horse-and-canine rescue unit are set to begin work in September, Rossius said.

Horse-and-canine rescue units are common for search-and-rescue operations in mountainous areas. Both Germany and the U.S. have voluntary associations that rely on horses and dogs for search-and-rescue missions.

Besides the fact that horses are a helpful means of transportation for rescue workers, both animals have sharp senses of hearing, smell and sight, all of which aids in rescue operations.

President Vladimir Putin met with Coca-Cola CEO Mukhtar Kent on Thursday to discuss preparations for the upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi, a statement on the president's official website said.

The meeting took place in Sochi after a ceremony marking the one-year countdown to the start of the 2014 Winter Olympics, of which Coca-Cola is a general sponsor.

The two men briefly discussed issues of cooperation in preparations for the games.

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