

Coastal Erosion Could Threaten Olympic Sites

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Extensive construction that was carried out in preparation for the Winter Olympics in Sochi has led to coastal erosion, which increases the risk of damaging newly built sports facilities and other infrastructure, ecologists said.

"There was quite a lot built in the coastal area, mostly roads and railways," Vladimir Slobodyan, head of the Institute of Environmental Design, said at a news conference this week. "As a result, the sediment balance was disturbed, and we can already observe coastal erosion. In the future it is possible that we will see deformation, even destruction of the facilities built in the coastal area for the Olympics."

The situation is most critical in the zone between the Lazarevskoye and Loo areas of Sochi, Slobodyan added. Here the mountain slopes are particularly close to the water.

The buildings on the mountains themselves could also be under threat of deformation

because they were built on slopes of unstable ground, which are particularly prone to landslides.

Mikhail Lychagin, geography professor at Lomonosov Moscow State University, led several research expeditions in the mountainous areas of Sochi. The construction of Olympic sites was not a completely positive experience for the environment, he said.

There was air pollution from trucks while work on the slopes dirtied the river water. However, Lychagin said that continued games-related construction was not causing serious environmental problems.

"Contamination occurs during any type of construction," he said. "The most important thing is to ensure that it is stopped or minimized after the construction wraps up. In our opinion, there are currently no serious threats in regards to pollution in the area."

Slobodyan also cautioned games organizers to be prepared for flooding. The most recent flood took place just a month ago. Though it was not large, it still managed to paralyze transportation in the southern half of the Olympic host city.

"The Olympics are scheduled for the winter season, which for the Sochi area, as for subtropical climate zones in general, is the most prone to flooding," Slobodyan said.

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