

Orenburg Mayor Urges Evacuations as Ural River Nears ‘Critical’ Levels

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A flooded residential area in the suburbs of Orenburg. EPA / TASS

Updated with Putin’s videoconference.

The southern Russian city of Orenburg is expected to face major flooding in the next 24 hours as water levels in the nearby Ural River continue to rise, local authorities [said](#) Thursday, urging residents in impacted areas to evacuate.

“I think [water levels] will peak in Orenburg within a day, followed by a plateau and a decrease,” Orenburg region Governor Denis Pasler [told](#) reporters. “All the necessary work is being carried out. Now the focus is on monitoring several points where the most difficult situation is being observed.”

Russia’s Orenburg region has been [grappling](#) with its worst flooding in decades, with dozens of cities and towns fully or partially submerged, after a protective dam burst late Friday near the city of Orsk.

In the regional capital of Orenburg, which has a population of about 550,000 people, the river embankment, several neighborhoods and some surrounding settlements have been underwater since late last week.

Related article: ['Devastating to See': Russia's Orenburg Region Battles Historic Flood](#)

The Ural River in Orenburg rose by 82 centimeters on Thursday morning, reaching 10.6 meters in height, which according to a local meteorological center is 1.3 meters above critical levels. Officials said the city has not seen flooding on that scale since at least 1947, calling the rising water “completely unprecedented.”

“I once again urge residents of flooded areas not to sit and wait for a critical situation, but evacuate from the danger zone as soon as possible,” Orenburg Mayor Sergei Salmin [said](#).

Fast-melting snow and ice have caused rivers in Russia's southern Urals, western Siberia as well as northern Kazakhstan to reach unprecedented levels.

Russian authorities say they have evacuated more than 7,700 people, mostly from the worst-hit Orenburg region, while Kazakhstan said around 100,000 of its citizens had been evacuated as of Wednesday. Russia estimates that 10,500 homes were flooded across 37 regions.

Later on Thursday, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a virtual meeting on flood relief efforts with top government officials and the governors of the three most impacted regions, including Orenburg's Pasler.

“We're in touch almost every day, but the situation changes hourly, so I'd first like to ask the governors to report on how you assess the situation,” Putin [said](#) during the meeting.

Pasler [told](#) the president that the Ural River had reached an “all-time” high of 10.87 meters. He also [estimated](#) that the floods have already caused 40 billion rubles (\$429 million) in damages in just the Orenburg region, which is double the [estimate](#) given by Russia's Construction Ministry over the weekend.

AFP contributed reporting.

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