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7 Dead After Apartment Block Explosion in Ural Mountains

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Updated with death toll.

At least seven people were killed in a gas explosion at an apartment block in the Ural Mountains region of Sverdlovsk on Thursday, Russian emergency officials said.

A large part of the five-story panel building in the industrial city of Nizhny Taigil was completely torn to pieces, videos showed. Officials told state media that a natural gas tank likely exploded, causing the apartment block to collapse.

According to news outlets, residents living nearby said they heard a powerful blast early Thursday.

By Friday evening, Russia's Emergency Services Ministry said seven bodies including those of children had been recovered from the rubble. More than a dozen others were rescued from the collapsed apartment block.

Law enforcement authorities launched a criminal probe into the incident.

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Gas explosions in residential buildings are not uncommon in Russia. Many apartment blocks built during the Soviet era are poorly maintained and repair work is sometimes delayed for years or never done at all.

According to the state-run TASS news agency, the apartment block that collapsed on Thursday was constructed in 1974 and was scheduled to undergo major remodeling in 2032.

Last September, a gas explosion at a residential building outside Moscow killed several people and injured dozens more.

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