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Falling Snow Kills 2 in Kamchatka as Winter Storms Slam Far East

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A person wades through snow in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. **Ulyana Pamsheva / TASS**

At least two people have been killed in the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky in Russia's Far East after snow fell from rooftops and buried them alive, local officials said Thursday, as the Kamchatka Peninsula remains largely paralyzed by a series of powerful winter storms.

Since Monday, several low-pressure systems forming in the Sea of Okhotsk have swept across Kamchatka and other parts of Far East Russia, bringing strong winds and record snowfall.

Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky Mayor Yevgeny Belyayev declared a citywide state of emergency shortly after the first death was reported on Thursday, a move intended to unlock additional resources for emergency snow removal.

Belyayev blamed property management companies for failing to clear rooftops promptly and accused them of waiting for the snowstorm to pass.

The regional branch of Russia's Investigative Committee said it launched a criminal

investigation into safety violations resulting in death after a 60-year-old man was killed by snow that fell from the roof of a two-story apartment building.

Related article: Snow Storm Paralyzes Kamchatka

The Kamchatka region's Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Lebedev said later in the day that a 63-year-old man was buried alive in snow that fell from the roof of a one-story home. Paramedics arrived at the scene and tried to resuscitate the man, but they were too late, Lebedev added.

"I once again urge you to be aware of huge snow piles that have formed on rooftops during the cyclone," the minister said in a statement. "Temperatures have risen, and so the snow has begun to fall from rooftops."

Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry shared a video on social media showing rescue workers tunneling through large snowbanks to reach elderly residents trapped inside their homes.

Life in Kamchatka has been brought to a virtual standstill after several days of heavy snowfall and strong winds. Schools have been closed and public transit suspended in the regional capital of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, where entire neighborhoods have been buried under snow.

Videos shared by a resident of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky with The Moscow Times showed snow mounds reaching to the second floor of apartment buildings and locals working together to remove snow blocking the entrances of buildings.

Meteorologists warned of severe winter weather in Kamchatka, with heavy wet snow, blizzard conditions and strong winds expected from Wednesday night through Thursday.

In Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and parts of the Yelizovsky district, forecasters warned of heavy snow, poor visibility and dangerous ice buildup from wet snow, with easterly winds reaching 25-30 meters per second (56-67 miles per hour).

Temperatures were expected to hover around freezing, between 0 and 2 degrees Celsius (32-36 degrees Fahrenheit), with icy roads, blowing snow and hazardous travel conditions across the region.

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