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Thousands in danger after Russian levee break

Some residents in the city of Orsk in Orenburg Region are being evacuated



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Around 4,000 households are at risk of flooding after a dike holding back the Ural River suffered a breach in the Russian city of Orsk in Orenburg Region on Friday.

The breach that forced the evacuations happened near the old town section of the city south of the river.

Earlier in the day, two leaks were discovered in the levee in the eastern part of the city. Maintenance crews were dispatched to repair the damage. Local authorities also warned residents to collect documents and essential belongings and proceed to temporary accommodation centers.

The region has been experiencing heavy rains and flooding in recent days due to which the water level of the Ural River near Orsk has been almost a meter higher than normal. Over 100 roads and 47 bridges have been closed due to the rising waters.

Local authorities have blamed the flooding on a combination of factors, including a sharp rise in temperatures melting the snow from the Urals mountains. The outflow from the Irikliysky reservoir, which has served to control the river, has reportedly broken all records at 2,150 cubic meters per second – although this is still not enough to cope with the inflow of 2,533 cubic meters per second.

As of Friday, some 1,100 residential buildings and 3,734 individual homes in 57 settlements across 23 municipalities have been affected by the floodwaters, and 1,663 people had been evacuated – including 421 children.

The Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations has dispatched two planes with special equipment and more than 100 personnel to Orsk to help mitigate the threat. Among the equipment were 20 boats and a pumping rig capable of pumping out up to 350 liters of water per second.

Orsk is the second largest city in the region, which is located near the Russian border with Kazakhstan. Founded in 1735, the city was originally named Orenburg.