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Killer icicles terrorise Russians

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by Marina Koreneva - Wed Mar 24, 11:01 am ET



AFP/File - Russians walk underneath a group of large icicles in central St. Petersburg on March 16. Walking along ...

SAINT PETERSBURG (AFP) - Walking along a Saint Petersburg Street immersed in music, Milana Kashtanova, became the latest victim of falling icicles and ice blocks that have killed five people and injured 147 in the city following Russia's coldest winter in 30 years.

Kashtanova, 21, has been in a coma since February when she was hit by the ice which was being cleared from a rooftop.

"Milana was just walking past a building in the city centre... There was no warning tape, nothing to alert people that people were working on the roof," Kashtanova's boyfriend, Irinei Kalachev, told AFP.

The toll has prompted residents and relatives of victims to demand action against those responsible for what they believe to be careless clearing of ice from rooftops.

"Every day, I go out into the street as if I was entering a war zone," complained resident Boris Ilinsky, 28.

"I've got to keep my eyes on the ground to avoid slipping and I'm also looking up to avoid falling lumps of ice," he added.

In Kashtanova's case, municipal authorities argued that the accident was her own fault, saying she ignored warning shouts from street cleaners because she was wearing headphones and listening to music, Kalachev said.

But her outraged family has appealed to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, demanding that he punish the city officials responsible.

The city hall however says that accidents are inevitable given the scale of the ice-clearing after such a severe winter.

"The snow falls this winter have been unprecedented, a kind of natural disaster. Unfortunately, there are victims," Yury Osipov, head of Saint Petersburg's housing committee, told AFP.

"There are 13,500 roofs in Saint Petersburg. With the current record snowfalls, the roofs should be cleared weekly to prevent blocks of ice. That's impossible, not least because it would paralyse traffic in the city."

The tragedy of Milana Kashtanova's accident is not uncommon. Thousands of street cleaners take to the rooftops of Russia's cities during the spring thaw, sweeping masses of snow and sharp-edged blocks of ice onto the pavements.

That means that during Russia's springtime thaw, residents are forced to run the gauntlet of snapping icicles and blocks of ice falling unexpectedly from roofs, as well as the ground-level hazards of slippery slush and puddles.

This week alone, a 55-year-old woman in central Moscow and a pensioner in the southwestern city of

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Voronezh were also killed by falling icicles, local investigators said.

Residents in Saint Petersburg complain that local authorities do not take proper precautions to protect the public.

"I have seen city employees clearing roofs without putting in place any safeguards to protect passersby," said city resident Marina Romanova.

In the face of mounting criticism, however, Saint Petersburg governor Valentina Matviyenko, has yielded to the pressure and threatened to fire dozens of city officials.

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I was born in moscow, and I too am a victim of falling icicles...

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Warning tape around icicles??? really? are these the same people that defended their city against the germans? throwing wave after wave of themselves at the enemy and getting shot for retreating and they are afraid of some icicles.... how bout you just don't walk under a roof or wear a hard hat

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It's George Bush's fault

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they should put the term "global warming" to bed. it's that we are causing "climate extremes", hence a 30 year coldest winter, etc. actually, data does reveal that this winter was actually up there with the warmest, but sure there are pockets of extremes. The UK was hit hard too. I wish that term never got into the mainstream all those years ago...

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