

Snow and Snowplows Paralyze Traffic

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Tractors and other equipment on Monday clearing away the 10 centimeters of snow that fell on Moscow overnight. **Igor Tabakov**

City Hall dispatched thousands of snowplows and tractors to clear snow from Moscow's streets, even as drivers stood in near-record traffic jams Monday and complained that Mayor Sergei Sobyenin had failed to keep up with the 10 centimeters of snow that fell overnight.

Hours-long traffic jams are expected for the rest of the week on many downtown streets and main thoroughfares, with snow forecast to fall every day and shoppers making holiday purchases.

Traffic jams on Monday reached nine on a 10-point scale compiled by Yandex, while 9,000 vehicles worked in shifts from Sunday night to clean the streets.

“Some drivers have complained that they haven't seen any snowplows, but if [the plows] were put on the street all at once, they would paralyze traffic,” said Igor Pergamentshik, a spokesman for the public utilities department, which oversees snow removal.

He said more than 200,000 cubic meters of snow, enough to fill about 2,000 dump trucks, were collected over the past 24 hours. Priority has been given to sidewalks, access points to metro stations and the areas around apartment buildings, he said.

Pergamentshik urged drivers to give way to the snowplows and to avoid parking their cars on sidewalks so snow-removal workers could do their jobs.

But some drivers complained that city authorities were not working with the public to reduce traffic jams, saying that information about when and where the snowplows would work would help ease congestion.

"It looks like the street-cleaning vehicles are working in an autonomous regime," said Sergei Kanayev, head of the Car Owners Federation.

Other drivers directed their anger at Sobyenin, whom they accused of not being as prepared to fight the snow as his predecessor, Yury Luzhkov, who was fired by President Dmitry Medvedev in September.

"Some say corruption was in bloom during his [Luzhkov's] tenure," blogger Drakonych wrote on LiveJournal. "But I don't give a damn about corruption. The roads were cleaned under Luzhkov."

But Yury Zagrebnoi, a former city official who heads the Mossoviet web site that covers city government, said City Hall has been using the same methods to fight snow as in previous years. He noted that the communal services department, which also deals with snow removal and is headed by Luzhkov-era bureaucrat Andrei Tsibin, remains untouched despite Sobyenin's flurry of reforms.

With snow expected to fall daily for the rest of the week and the emergence of holiday shoppers, the authorities will have their hands full trying to clear the streets, he said.

"All of this will create more anger," he said.

The temperature is forecast to sink to a daytime high of minus 18 degrees Celsius by Thursday, before rising slightly.

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