

Class-Action Petition Sent to Aeroflot

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Lawyers organizing the claim say one hour of delay is worth 4,000 rubles. **Maxim Stulov**

Lawyer Sergei Litvintsev took extra time off from work to celebrate the New Year's holiday in Egypt with his family, but the vacation got off to an unfortunate start because an ice storm delayed his flight from Sheremetyevo Airport by 28 hours.

Frustrated by the lack of information on the Aeroflot flight, Litvintsev, 24, decided to get even with the largest Russian airline. While waiting, he met another lawyer, Kristina Kameneva, and the two devised a plan, he told The Moscow Times on Friday.

Once finally airborne, they collected other passengers' contact information for potential further legal action to demand compensation from the airline for emotional stress and financial damages while being stranded.

Back in Moscow, they started a Facebook group, "Citizen Action Against Aeroflot," which brought together people who found themselves in a similar situation at the airport. In a collective petition that the lawyers finally submitted to the airline Thursday, they represent

a group with 600 members, Litvintsev said.

One of them, Filipp Chistov, 32, said he was flying to Austria to ski with a group of friends but got stuck for about two days at Sheremetyevo. He lost about \$1,000 in unused hotel reservations and airport meal costs.

But the chaos at the terminal — the lack of food, information or support — is what enraged him the most, he said.

"People are tired of being treated so rudely. We want to show a monopolist that we deserve respect," Chistov said.

Litvintsev is raising the prospect of another claim because the number of potential plaintiffs in the online community has grown to more than 1,000, he said.

The group is demanding a payment of 100,000 rubles to 150,000 rubles (\$3,420 to \$5,130) for each member, depending on the hours spent waiting. One hour is worth 4,000 rubles, Litvintsev said.

They also want a public apology from the airline because they insist that, contrary to the law, it failed to provide them with adequate meals or any hotel rooms.

"The departure time kept changing," Litvintsev said. "I was livid."

If Aeroflot rejects the demands, the group will take the matter to court, Litvintsev said.

Aeroflot spokeswoman Irina Dannenberg said Friday that the company would consider the petition. She apologized for the delayed flights and said that next time the airport should be closed.

About 20,000 passengers were stranded at Moscow airports for nearly three days at the end of December as many carriers had to cancel hundreds of flights because an ice storm disrupted power lines and deicing fluid was in short supply.

Aeroflot, whose passengers account for the largest proportion of the victims, at the time gave out 500 ruble (\$17) vouchers for food, which soon ran out.

Aeroflot fired deputy chief executive officer Vladimir Smirnov in the aftermath and offered a voucher for a one-way flight to a country of the passenger's choice. So far only 3,000 vouchers have been claimed, Danenberg said.

Metropol analyst Andrei Rozhkov said many victims of the delays are unable to afford purchasing the return ticket necessary to take advantage of Aeroflot's compensation offer, hence the low claim rate.

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