

Taxi Drivers Facing Stricter Regulation

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Taxi passengers will be looking for meters and receipts under new rules. **Igor Tabakov**

Taxi drivers will have to carry licenses beginning Sept. 1 and will face fines for not giving receipts from January, under amendments to existing traffic laws.

"From Sept. 1, legal entities and individual entrepreneurs active in transport of passengers and baggage in taxis will be obliged to carry a current permit," Vladimir Kuzin, deputy head of the Interior Ministry's Department for Enforcement of Road Safety, said in comments posted on the department's web site Saturday.

The permits, introduced as one of several amendments to current law passed on April 21, will be valid only in the region where they are issued unless interregional agreements make them valid in more than one region, Kuzin said.

He did not specify how much a license would cost or where taxi drivers could apply for one.

Yanush Pinter, a manager at Moscow firm Formula Taxi, said by telephone that he had not yet

received any detailed information about how or where to apply for licenses.

Repeated calls to the Department for Enforcement of Road Safety went unanswered Monday.

Amendments to the Code on Administrative Violations will see the introduction of stricter rules for taxi drivers on Jan. 1, including liability for working without a lighted "Taxi" sign, or failing to issue cash receipts.

The new rules will also require taxis to have a light, display checkered panels on the side of the vehicle and display "sufficient information" — including the permit and a meter — inside the cab.

Fines for violating the rules will be set at of 1,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$35 to \$175) for drivers, 10,000 to 50,000 for taxi company officials, and 30,000 to 200,000 rubles for legal entities, Kuzin said.

Illegally displaying taxi markings will result in similar fines.

It is unclear how the measures will be enforced or what impact they will have on the vast number of unlicensed taxi drivers already working illegally.

Mikhail Blinkin, a traffic expert at the state-run TII Roads and Transport, said the new laws would do little to help licensed drivers and professional taxi companies in the perpetual battle with gypsy cab drivers.

"More fines won't change anything. The first step is to give legal taxi drivers priority at places like airports and railway stations. In that regard, much has been promised, but nothing has changed," he said by telephone.

Meanwhile, all drivers will face an increased fine of 1,000 rubles for running a red light or "blocking the box" — entering an intersection where there is already a traffic jam.

The current fine for running a light is 300 rubles, while someone who "aggravates the situation" at an already congested intersection gets off with a warning or a 100 ruble fine.

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