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Sidewalk Workers Face the Ax

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Moscow officials denied Monday that workers laying down road bricks on a downtown sidewalk have simply painted them over the pavement, but said the workers will be fired nevertheless, RIA-Novosti reported.

Photographs of a sidewalk near the Mayakovskaya metro station, posted by numerous bloggers, showed bricks carefully drawn on freshly laid concrete.

But a representative for the company contracted to repave the sidewalk, Mosoblsportstroi, said the workers were simply "fooling around." He added that the company enforces strict quality control.

However, the City Hall has earmarked 3 million rubles to check the newly laid bricks downtown, following reports about subpar quality, an unidentified City Hall official told Interfax on Monday. The check is to wrap up by October.

Meanwhile, mayor Sergei Sobyanin said his wife is a kindergarten teacher, not a businesswoman, and has nothing to do with City Hall's ambitious project to replace millions of square meters of downtown sidewalks with gray brick, Vedomosti reported Monday.

In an interview, the mayor again dismissed speculation that companies affiliated with Irina Sobyanina were handed contracts for replacing asphalt with bricks. He did not name the kindergarten she works at.

Sobyanin also defended the sidewalk program, launched in May without public discussion, saying that asphalt, a byproduct of oil production, is harmful for the environment.

He said the program's cost for this year stood at 2 billion rubles ($69 million), despite City Hall speaking of 4 billion rubles earlier. The discrepancy could not be immediately explained.

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