

Customs Official Flouts Traffic Rules in Rush to Dry Cleaners

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Three months after a top customs official's car was videotaped pulling into a shopping mall with its blue light flashing, an explanation has finally been offered: The official urgently needed to pick up a suit from the dry cleaners.

Vladimir Malinin needed the suit for an official function where he would be representing the Customs Service, agency chief Andrei Belyanikov wrote in a letter to LiveJournal blogger habar777 that was [posted](#) on anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny's blog Monday.

"According to protocol, he could only appear in a black suit," Belyanikov wrote in the letter, adding that Malinin's driver had activated the flashing blue light atop his luxury Audi sedan by accident.

Malinin, who serves as first deputy chief of the Federal Customs Service, has not commented on the incident.

The video of Malinin's dramatic June 1 trip to the cleaners set off a firestorm in the

blogosphere, where bloggers harangued him for abusing his flashing blue light, which gives owners, presumably on official business, the right to ignore traffic rules.

Reports of similar abuses are a regular occurrence in Russia — especially in Moscow, where officials and VIPs often use all means necessary to beat the city's clogged motorways.

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