

Dragnet Laid for Flashy Drivers

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Moscow police on Tuesday launched a weeklong campaign against the use of flashing blue lights by unauthorized drivers, Interfax reported, citing the police's press office.

The gadgets on the roofs of cars give users the right to disobey many traffic rules and are reserved for high-ranking officials. But illegal lights have proliferated, and the high-risk driving they permit has become the bane of many drivers as well as a despised symbol of privilege.

On Tuesday, police set up checkpoints on major thruways and throughout the city center — including on Novy Arbat and Ulitsa Znamenka — where they stopped cars equipped with the lights and checked drivers' documents, Interfax reported. The hunt was prompted by a recent incident on Novy Arbat in which two cars with the lights that were driving in opposite directions in the safety zone scraped each other's sides after neither driver gave way, motorist rights activist Pyotr Shkumatov told Interfax.

Police discovered that both drivers — whose names were withheld — were using the lights illegally, he added.

To have a lasting effect, crackdowns on violators need to become a regular event, which is not currently on the police's agenda, Shkumatov said.

The driver of a Lexus with a flashing light who assaulted a Novaya Gazeta correspondent on the Moscow Ring Road last week had his license revoked for drunk driving, Shkumatov's organization, Blue Buckets, said on its web site.

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