

Mercedes Pays to Topple Logo

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The House on the Embankment hosted the mammoth sign for a decade. **Igor Tabakov**

A huge Mercedes Benz emblem that has looked across at the Kremlin for 10 years from its rooftop home by the Moscow River was removed Wednesday as part of a government campaign to reduce the quantity of advertising in the city.

The 6.5-ton object with a diameter of 8 meters took one crane and 5 1/2 hours to take down from Dom na Naberezhnoi, or House on the Embankment, a former home to Communist Party elite. Work began at 11 p.m. on Tuesday, according to the Moscow department for press and advertising.

Vladimir Chernikov, head of the department, said in September that the agreement under which it was erected had expired, and that it had been in place illegally for a number of years, Vedomosti reported. He complained that the owners of the logo had been reluctant to pay for its removal.

But a spokeswoman for Mercedes-Benz Russia told The Moscow Times that the company had

not been flouting the law. "We have all the documents, and all of the inhabitants of the building agreed that our star could be on the roof," she said. "It was completely legal."

She added that the idea to take down the giant emblem had been the company's after they noticed a change in Moscow government "politics."

But Vladimir Yakovlev, a spokesman for the Moscow city department for press and advertising, directly contradicted Mercedes' account.

"This idea was the government of Moscow's," Yakovlev said by phone.

Mercedes declined to comment on who had financed the removal, but Yakovlev said Mercedes had footed the bill. He added that "not one single kopek" had been paid by the city.

The case received the personal attention of Mayor Sergei Sobyenin Saturday when he promised that the giant silver logo would be removed within a couple of weeks.

The disappearance of Mercedes' presence from its famous location is not the only dramatic change to the city's landscape precipitated by the campaign against advertisements. Vesti.ru reported Monday that the giant advertising space on the scaffolding that hides the demolished site of the Hotel Rossia opposite Red Square was being dismantled.

Owned by News Outdoor, an advertising subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, the hoarding — 10,000 square meters in size — was the biggest site of its type in Europe, and estimated to have generated 360 million rubles (\$12 million) revenue a year.

Chernikov, whose department is conducting the removal of advertisements, said in June that an inspection of the legality of all advertising sites in the city would be completed by Nov. 1. All advertisements attached to scaffolding and building sites will be removed by the end of the year, he said.

"Moscow is a very beautiful city, and we think it should be visible to Muscovites and to tourists," spokesman Yakovlev said Wednesday.

On its official Facebook page, Mercedes-Benz asked readers to mourn the removal of its flagship advertisement. "It had almost become one of the symbols of the hero-city [Moscow]," commented one follower, Olga Danilina.

But those who might miss the German brand's presence on the city's skyline should not grieve too soon. Mercedes-Benz said it was looking for another site in central Moscow where the giant logo could be re-erected.

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