

New Rules May Mean Easier Car Certificate

By [Roland Oliphant](#)

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✘ It is traditional to give up bad habits at the beginning of the year, and in seasonal spirit, the Interior Ministry has promised that traffic cops will stop asking motorists to produce technical inspection certificates.

“Whether or not a car has passed technical inspection will now be checked by insurers,” Vladimir Shvetsov, first deputy head of the Interior Ministry’s road safety division, told RIA-Novosti just before the New Year.

The article prohibiting driving without a certificate has been struck from the Civil Code as part of a package of reforms to traffic regulations that came into force Jan. 1.

Russian law requires cars more than 3 years old to undergo an inspection for road-worthiness once every two years. Cars more than 7 years old are obliged to take annual tests.

Responsibility for periodic vehicle inspections has been transferred from the Interior Ministry to the Russian Union of Automobile Insurers. Instead of being enforced by police on the street, an inspection certificate will be required to obtain obligatory automobile insurance.

Apart from taking some of the fear out of driving — previously, a driver caught by a cop without an inspection certificate faced a 2,500 ruble (\$78) fine, a driving ban and the impounding of his or her vehicle — the reform is hoped to mean the end of huge lines at service centers licensed to do the tests.

Under the old arrangement there were 3,000 places run by the Interior Ministry or approved contractors, which made periodic checkups on cars.

But drivers groups have complained that long lines for a test makes corruption an attractive way out for both sides. Dron.ru, a motorists' web site, has estimated that more than 50 percent of Russian motorists bought their inspection certificates with a bribe to circumvent the wait.

To create more capacity, any service center with a mechanic approved by the Car Insurers Union will now be able to issue certificates. The procedure itself has been cut from 41 to 30 minutes, largely by scrapping checks of the first aid kit, airbags and brake pads.

Repeated calls to the union went unanswered Monday, but a spokesman told Gazeta.ru at the end of December that 1,621 operators running a total of 2,249 different service centers had registered by the beginning of the New Year holidays, and another 1,200 more were expected to sign up "soon."

It is unclear whether the measures will be enough to eliminate the notorious lines during the annual rush for inspections in the spring. A booming auto market of recent years means an ever-increasing burden of 3-year-old vehicles coming up for their first inspection. Three million new cars sold in 2008 – the peak of the pre-crisis auto market – and 1.5 million in 2009.

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