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Sochi Residents Face Pre-Olympic Laundry Crackdown

By The Moscow Times

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Laundry drying on balconies and air conditioners that look "chaotic" will earn Sochi residents fines of up to $46 as the city focuses on looking pretty ahead of next year's Winter Olympics, authorities said.

The crackdown has come about because Sochi "should look especially decent in a zone of international hospitality," the local government said Tuesday in a website statement that explicitly linked the move to "the preparation period for the Games."

The move invites comparisons to Potemkin villages, a possibly apocryphal tale of an 18th century general creating attractive fake settlements to impress Empress Catherine the Great.

"If people have made the decision to install an air conditioner, they should have a symmetrical location on the building and be agreed upon with all the [other] owners, so that in the future if the owners put up equipment, it isn't placed in a chaotic way, but in an agreed

scheme," Sochi's deputy mayor Yevgeny Gorlov said in a website statement.

Sochi residents should "not hang laundry on balconies, but use special areas," local authorities said.

Some cases have already been recorded, the local government said. The violations carry fines from 50 rubles ($1.50) to 1,500 rubles ($46).

There is a precedent for pre-Olympic tidying-up programs. Ahead of the 2008 Games in Beijing, the Chinese government embarked on various initiatives to encourage locals to wait in line in stores properly, dress more stylishly and even cut down on bad breath by eating less garlic.

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