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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Alcohol Sales Could Be Restricted to Card-Only-Payments, Report Says

By The Moscow Times

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Lawmakers, worried about the effect of alcohol on health, have been increasing restrictions on sales.
Vladimir Filonov

A State Duma Deputy has drafted a bill that would only allow alcohol to be purchased using credit or debit cards, a news report said Monday.

"Russia remains one of the world leaders in per capita alcohol consumption," said Oleg Mikheyev in an explanatory letter accompanying the bill. Mikheyev said the measure would allow the sale of alcohol to be better controlled, hindering sales to minors, Izvestia reported.

Mikheyev, a member of the A Just Russia party, said that switching to bank cards would mean there would no longer be any reason for people to steal cash to buy alcohol or use elderly relatives' pensions to finance their drinking habits.

The deputy said alcoholism related health concerns are the driving force behind the

legislation.

Over the past several years the sale of alcohol in Russia has been increasingly restricted. The sale of alcohol after 11 p.m. and in street-kiosks has been prohibited, and minimum prices for vodka have been introduced. Excise axes and import duties on alcohol have also been increased.

Mikheyev identified kiosks and small shops as points of sale that flout restrictions.

Retail chain Ashan-Rossiya's communications director said bank-card-only payment for alcohol would not be an obstacle for major chains, but would present a major financial outlay for smaller retailers who do not currently have electronic payment devices.

United Russia party member Igor Rudensky said the idea was very positive because of its focus on stamping out sales to underage customers, but warned that it would be difficult to set up in small towns and villages.

The effort comes at a difficult time for the Russian beer market with production having dropped by nearly 4 percent in 2012, a loss manufacturers attribute to greater restrictions on alcohol sales.

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