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# U.S.-Visa Applicants Bury iPads, Hide Belongings Due to New Embassy Rules

By Yekaterina Kravtsova

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The U.S. Embassy in Moscow has introduced new safety rules for its visitors, and they seem to have taken many visa applicants by surprise.

As per rules introduced Sept. 1, all electronic equipment, including mobile phones, headphones and battery chargers, is prohibited as are liquids, food and cigarettes.

"The rules have been applied at all U.S. Embassies around the world, Russia simply hadn't followed them before," said a representative of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow by telephone, adding that all visa applicants were informed about the changes before receiving appointment times for their interviews.

But most of those who came to interviews at the embassy Friday seemed to be unaware of the new rules and had to resort to unorthodox solutions to hide their belongings before entering the building.

Interfax reported that one visitor buried his iPad near one of the embassy police booths, while another put his things in a flower bed on the sidewalk on the Garden Ring outside the embassy building.

Most people, however, left their belongings on the grass lawn near the entrance, or in a car parked by the embassy, according to the news agency.

A few crafty entrepreneurs stood near the line of visa applicants offering to let them keep their things in a nearby car for 100 rubles ($3.13), an arrangement many of the embassy visitors found dubious.

"Where's the guarantee that, having collected several iPads, the car won't just up and leave in an unknown direction?" one visitor said, Interfax reported.

Visitors used to be able to leave personal items that were not allowed at the interview in special compartments, but according to the new rules only mobile phones can be left there now.

A notice on the embassy website says the number of compartments is "extremely limited" and recommends coming without even a mobile phone.

The full list of prohibited objects is posted on the embassy's website, which says, however, that the list is not exhaustive and that the guards can forbid other things at their discretion.

When asked by applicants where they could leave their personal belongings, guards did not answer the question but simply proposed that they leave the embassy building, Interfax reported.

A U.S. Embassy representative said by phone, "The guards just followed instructions that the applicants had also been informed of."

The rules seem to be applied even more strictly in the U.S. Consulates in other cities around the country. The U.S. Embassy website says there are no locker rooms in the Consulate General in St. Petersburg, and visitors are asked not to take mobile phones with them.

Contact the author at e.kravtsova@imedia.ru

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