

No Passports Required to Use Public Wi-Fi, Moscow City Hall Says

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According to the text of the decree published on the government's online information portal, in order to use "collective access points," Internet users will have to provide Wi-Fi operators with their passport details.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree Friday instructing public Wi-Fi network operators to require user identification — but only in certain spots.

The decree was almost immediately greeted with outrage from many residents of Moscow, where Wi-Fi is widely available in parks, cafes, schools and on some forms of public transportation. But Moscow City Hall soon clarified that the law would only apply to certain "collective access points:" primarily post offices.

"This will not apply to Wi-Fi in parks, on the metro, in universities, schools or hospitals in Moscow. Use Wi-Fi and enjoy the Internet," ITAR Tass cited Artyom Yermolayev, head of the city's information technologies department, as saying Friday.

"[The new law] is only talking about collective access points, and when that document was released, they had precisely those points" in mind, Yermolayev said in the report.

As of Jan. 1, there were more than 20,000 such access points across the country, he was cited as saying.

Several Russian media outlets reported earlier Friday that Medvedev had signed a law banning anonymous Wi-Fi usage in restaurants, cafes, parks and other public places.

According to the text of the decree published on the government's online information portal, in order to use "collective access points," Internet users will have to provide Wi-Fi operators with their passport details. Operators will then be obliged to save the information for six months, and if necessary, hand it over to law enforcement authorities.

The bill was initiated in early July by Irina Yarovaya, head of the State Duma's Security and Anti-Corruption Committee and a member of the ruling party United Russia.

The Communications Ministry issued a statement Friday saying that while users would not necessarily be required to submit passport details, operators will be obliged to collect information on users.

If the Wi-Fi access point was installed by a communications service provider, it is required to collect information on users, though "if the Wi-Fi access point was installed by an individual, they have no obligations" under the new law, the statement said.

How the service providers choose to collect user information is up to them, according to the ministry's statement. They may send the user a text message requesting their full name and driver's license number, or they may establish an online form requesting such information, the statement said.

See also:

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