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McDonald's Raided By Russia's Food Watchdog Over 'Hygiene Complaints'

By The Moscow Times

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People walk past a closed McDonald's restaurant, one of three in Moscow shut by Russia's food safety watchdog over hygiene complaints.

Russia ramped up its scrutiny of McDonald's on Thursday, as the state food safety watchdog began unscheduled checks in several Russian regions, a day after four branches in Moscow were shut down.

The food safety agency cited breaches of sanitary rules by restaurants in the fast food chain, but the action came after Moscow and the West imposed tit-for-tat sanctions over the conflict in Ukraine. The agency denied that its actions were politically motivated.

"There are complaints about the quality and safety of the products in fast food restaurant chain McDonald's," said the regulatory agency, Rospotrebnadzor. It declined to comment on the scope of the planned checks.

The regulator said Thursday it is already conducting checks at McDonald's outlets in the Ural mountains region of Sverdlovsk, the Volga region of Tatarstan, the central Voronezh region and the Moscow region.

It also plans checks in the republic of Bashkortostan and the southern Krasnodar region. Some of the checks are unscheduled.

Natalya Lukyantseva, an official of the regulator's branch in the Sverdlovsk region, said checks had been started because of complaints from customers.

"We are aware of what is going on. We have always been and are now open to any checks," McDonald's Russian spokeswoman said. She could not comment on the reasons for the checks.

On Wednesday, the agency ordered the suspension of operations at four McDonald's restaurants in Moscow over what it said were "numerous" sanitary law breaches.

The shuttered restaurants include one on Moscow's Pushkin Square, which McDonald's says is the busiest in its global network of restaurants. For a generation of Russians who saw the first McDonald's open in the dying days of the Soviet Union in 1990, the restaurants were a symbol of American capitalism. For most Muscovites now, they are just a part of the urban landscape.

McDonald's operates 438 restaurants in Russia and considers the country one of its top seven major markets outside the United States and Canada, according to its 2013 annual report.

Last month, Rospotrebnadzor's branch in the Novgorod region opened a court case against McDonald's as a result of the June inspections of its restaurants.

It said at the time that McDonald's was deceiving consumers about the energy value of its burgers and about nutritional value of its desserts, and that its vegetable salad were contaminated with harmful bacteria.

See also:

[Russia Suspends Operations at 4 McDonald's Restaurants in Moscow]

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