

Russian Bookseller Chitai-Gorod Spent Millions Destroying Banned Books, CEO Says

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Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency

Russia's largest bookstore chain, Chitai-Gorod-Bukvoed, has spent around 100 million rubles (\$1.2 million) in recent years removing and destroying books that violate the country's increasingly strict censorship laws, its CEO [told](#) the RBC news outlet on Tuesday.

CEO Alexander Brychkin said the expenses were connected to storing, transporting and paying specialized services to shred the censored books, "all of which adds up to a huge volume of work and significant costs."

"We cannot just throw these books in the trash. They're toxic waste. Accordingly, they must be disposed of, and this is also at our expense. A contractor destroys the books on camera using an industrial shredder," he said.

"No one is reimbursing our expenses," Brychkin told RBC.

Since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian stores and libraries have had to remove [scores of books](#) from their shelves as the government increasingly curtails freedom of speech and the press.

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Brychkin said Chitai-Gorod has spent “tens of millions” of additional rubles placing anti-drug warning stickers on 2 million books.

He argued that the government also denies booksellers a fair opportunity to bring their inventories into compliance before facing legal prosecution.

“A book at the moment of its release complied with the spirit and letter of Russian law. And then at some point an expert evaluation arises,” Brychkin said.

“And at the exact moment this evaluation appears, they begin to hold us liable. We do not even have a chance to meet the requirements of the law,” he told RBC.

Brychkin proposed the creation of a system that warns booksellers beforehand when a specific title enters state review so that they can reduce their legal risks.

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