

Russian Anti-Drug Vigilantes Ordered to Pay Nearly 1 Million Rubles

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A controversial organization run by the renegade mayor of Yekaterinburg and known for its unorthodox and at times brutal approach to combating drug addiction has been ordered to pay out nearly a million rubles (\$25,000) in back-rent.

City Without Drugs has gained international notoriety for its vigilante-style pursuits. The New York Times published a feature on the group in 2011 claiming that its activists confine unwilling junkies to bunk beds, forcing them to get clean with little more than gruel and the passage of time. Prior to that, the organization had generally handcuffed addicts to their beds, according to the report.

The foundation was established in 1999 by Yekaterinburg's current mayor, Yevgeny Roizman, who vowed in comments to Interfax on Wednesday that he would appeal the back-rent decision, arguing that the organization should receive preferential treatment due to the nature of its work.

In December 2013, after months without a rent check for the group's Yekaterinburg facility, the Sverdlovsk region's Public Assets Ministry filed a complaint with a commercial court to compel the foundation to pay up. In February, that lawsuit was shelved when the foundation filed a countersuit seeking preferential terms for the rent due to the organization's ongoing war on drugs.

"The foundation isn't refusing to pay the rent. But we have a legal basis to get preferential terms, since this is the only organization working with children who have drug problems. I think we will find a way out of this situation," Roizman was cited as saying.

After a court ruled against the City Without Drugs countersuit in August, however, the region's original lawsuit to obtain overdue rent was re-opened. Roizman has frequently butted heads with Sverdlovsk authorities since establishing City Without Drugs.

In July, he was questioned by police in connection with the killing of an 80-year-old pensioner, but was not charged in the case.

During the Yekaterinburg mayoral campaign last year, Sverdlovsk region prosecutors threatened to investigate Roizman's alleged ties to an organized crime ring called Uralmash after a state-run television channel ran an exposé claiming he was receiving support from the group in the race.

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