

Friday, August 12, 2005

**DCA HITS THE STREETS FOR 3rd ANNUAL BUSINESS EDUCATION DAY: TEAMS BLANKET SMALL BUSINESSES IN EVERY BOROUGH WITH INFORMATION ABOUT CONSUMER PROTECTION LAWS**

*Dept. of Consumer Affairs, Dept. of Small Business Services, Elected Officials & Business Organizations Team Up to Go Door-to-Door Distributing Brochures and Answering Questions*

New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Acting Commissioner Jonathan Mintz today launched DCA's third annual **BUSINESS EDUCATION DAY** – an aggressive five borough effort to educate local businesses about the City's Consumer Protection and Licensing Laws, without issuing violations. DCA is targeting ten neighborhoods citywide that have large retail areas or received consumer complaints. Staff from the NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS), elected officials, and business organizations joined DCA throughout the day. Teams visited hundreds of storefronts, meeting individually with managers and employees to explain the laws, answer questions, distribute copies of the DCA's *Ten Things Every Business Should Know* pocket guide in multiple languages, and encourage businesses to call 311 for more information.

"With dozens of DCA staff distributing brochures and speaking with store owners in every borough, we're making it easy for businesses to know the law," said DCA Acting Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "Educating businesses protects consumers. Conducting regular inspections, imposing tough penalties for violators, and DCA's aggressive outreach efforts like 'Business Education Day' are key to continuing high compliance citywide."

"Mayor Bloomberg realizes that the City's more than 200,000 small businesses are the backbone of our economy," said SBS Commissioner Robert Walsh. "NYC Business Solutions is at the forefront of our effort to support them, with Centers in all five boroughs and an outreach team that canvasses neighborhoods throughout the City. We offer free services ranging from navigating government to accessing financing and incentives to hiring and training workers. We know that most small business owners do not have time to come to us, and by going to them we ensure they have the information they need to grow and thrive."

Neighborhoods visited as part of **BUSINESS EDUCATION DAY 2005** include Bay Ridge and Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, East Tremont Avenue and Boston Road in the Bronx, the Queens Mall in Rego Park/Corona and Main Street in Flushing, Canal Street in lower Manhattan, Midtown Manhattan, and the Staten Island Mall and Richmond Avenue in Staten Island. DCA distributed *Ten Things Every Business Should Know* pocket guides in English, Spanish and Chinese including information about:

- Businesses that require a DCA license.
- Rules regarding refund policy and receipts.
- Scales and weighing merchandise.
- Posting prices.
- How businesses can resolve consumer complaints.

"I commend the efforts of the Department of Consumer Affairs in reaching out to our Flushing community. Education is key," said New York State Assemblyman Jimmy Meng. "As Assemblyman of this district, our office has indeed received more complaints than acceptable, and the DCA has always handled each complaint in an expeditious and professional manner."

Joel M. Dabu, Commercial Revitalization Manager of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation said: "Educating business owners in the Fulton Street business district on the importance of following the City's consumer protection laws is critical in building a loyal customer base for Fulton Street. Having the Department of Consumer Affairs as an active partner in this education effort will help ensure the continued strengthening and commercial revitalization of one of Brooklyn's most important retail corridors."

Mabel Law, Executive Director of the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub Business Improvement District said: "I think it is important for our business members to know what the rules are but to also know who to contact and how to follow the rules in order to conduct good business and build a strong customer base. I want to thank the Department of Consumer Affairs and Department of Small Business Services for inviting the BID in this outreach effort and for making the information available in other languages."

This year the DCA received more than 6,000 consumer complaints citywide and more than 62,000 requests for information. Complaints about refund policies, home improvement contracting, furniture and electronics sales, and debt collection were among the most common. Routine inspections conducted citywide over the past year show business compliance with Consumer Protection Laws, specifically refunds and receipts, is high at 89%.

Copies of all brochures including the DCA's *Ten Things Every Business Should Know* pocket guide in English, Spanish and Chinese are available by calling 311 (or 212-NEW-YORK) or online at [www.NYC.gov/consumers](http://www.NYC.gov/consumers).

DCA's enforcement squads operate from borough offices located in Manhattan, Brooklyn/Staten Island, Queens, and the Bronx, allowing staff to work closely with Community Boards and other City agencies to coordinate efforts and respond to complaints quickly. Over the past three years DCA inspectors have been cross-trained in a number of areas including routine testing of scales, consumer protection violations, license checks, and other areas. Cross-trained inspections have allowed for more comprehensive inspections at each location, resulting in the elimination of burdensome multiple visits to businesses.

DCA enforces the New York City Consumer Protection Law and other related laws at thousands of businesses. Fostering a marketplace where consumers are protected and businesses thrive, DCA licenses more than 60,000 businesses in 55 different categories. Through targeted outreach, partnerships with community and trade organizations, and other informational materials, DCA educates consumers and businesses alike about their rights and responsibilities. For more information visit DCA online at [www.NYC.gov/consumers](http://www.NYC.gov/consumers).

The NYC Department of Small Business Services makes it easier for companies in New York City to form, do business and grow by providing direct assistance to business owners, fostering neighborhood development in commercial districts, promoting financial and economic opportunity among minority- and women-owned businesses, preparing New Yorkers for jobs and linking employers with a skilled and qualified workforce. For more information, visit [www.NYC.gov/sbs](http://www.NYC.gov/sbs).