



Department of Consumer Affairs

2007 Annual Report

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
Jonathan Mintz, Commissioner

Message from the Mayor and the Commissioner



Dear Friends,

In the PlaNYC spirit of taking small steps and big strides, we welcome you to a new “green” first for the Department of Consumer Affairs: our paperless Annual Report!

In 2007, organizational changes, new technologies, and litigation milestones enabled DCA to serve New York’s citizens, businesses, and tourists better, faster, and with broader impact.

Indeed, the story of 2007 at Consumer Affairs is one of bold innovation and record results. Working with First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris, we not only continue to focus on ensuring a fair and vibrant marketplace for New York’s consumers and

businesses, but we have also taken the Department into new territory. Our new Office of Financial Empowerment represents several firsts: it’s the first program to be implemented under the Center for Economic Opportunity, established by the Administration to reduce poverty in New York City through results-driven and innovative initiatives; and the first city program in the nation that has as its mission actually bettering the financial circumstances of workers with low incomes.

As groundbreaking as it is to house this unique mission within city government, OFE is proving to be a natural fit within DCA’s strategic priorities: empowering and protecting consumers, facilitating fair business practices, and conducting efficient, accountable, customer-friendly operations.

This year’s report puts you in the driver’s seat — click on any section and learn at your own pace, in pictures and sound, about DCA’s work this past year. If you’d prefer, you can choose to read the report on screen or request a paper copy by calling 311. Like with all good consumer decisions, the choice is yours.

So start the story. It’s a click away.

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

Jonathan Mintz, Commissioner

2007 Highlights

In fiscal year 2007, the Department of Consumer Affairs undertook a bold new program—called the Office of Financial Empowerment—which broadened our mission, and attained record results for New York City consumers and businesses.

Expanded Public Service

Launched in December 2006 as the first program to be implemented as part of Mayor Bloomberg's aggressive efforts to fight poverty in New York City, the Office of Financial Empowerment—known as OFE—expands DCA's mission, drawing from rich agencywide resources to educate, empower, and protect those with low incomes in order to help them get, save, and grow assets. Beyond helping New York's working families and individuals secure benefits to which they are entitled or tackling exploitive practices, DCA's OFE seeks to improve their economic condition, making it the only local government program of its kind in the nation.



Record EITC Call Volume

In the fifth year of the DCA-coordinated Earned Income Tax Credit Campaign, 311, the City's 24-hour Customer Service hotline, received approximately 30,000 calls from New Yorkers heeding the message to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit—known as EITC—and file their taxes for free. This volume of calls reflects a nearly 40% increase compared to 2006. DCA's OFE will manage future Campaigns working with the New York City Coalition—the nation's largest—now with more than 150 public, private, and nonprofit partners. This past year, the Coalition's nonprofit partners managed over 40 sites Citywide, where more than 60,000 eligible New Yorkers filed their taxes for free, nearly 30,000 of them claiming the EITC.



Reduced Wait Time

Visitors to DCA's Licensing Center waited on average only 10 minutes to be served—down three minutes compared to last year's speedy standard.

Enhanced Online Licensing Service

To make the licensing process easier and faster for New York City's businesses, DCA partnered with the Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications and the software company, Adobe, to create a new online application form with 2-D bar code technology. This bar code allows Licensing Center staff to scan information quickly into DCA's database. Since the October 2006 launch, nearly 250 new business applicants have used this form.

Record Payout to Homeowners

As part of the agency's largest home improvement settlement, 123 City homeowners victimized by a home improvement contractor received refunds totaling more than \$600,000. DCA also secured an agreement with the contractor to surrender his licenses.

Record Compliance with Tobacco Regulations

Commissioner Mintz joined Mayor Bloomberg at an assembly of Queens middle school students in April to announce that a record 89% of City businesses refused to sell cigarettes to under-age kids, and a record 91% of businesses did not make repeat illegal sales. In fiscal year 2007, inspectors and teens went "undercover" more than 13,000 times to check stores for compliance.

Overview of DCA

Created in 1968 by merging the departments of Weights and Measures and Licensing, the Department of Consumer Affairs gained additional authority with passage of New York City's landmark Consumer Protection Law in 1969, making it the first municipal agency of its kind in the country. The Department's mission—to ensure that consumers and businesses benefit from a fair and vibrant marketplace—is evident in the work we do every day.

Empowering and protecting consumers, facilitating fair business practices, conducting efficient, accountable, customer-friendly operations—these priorities direct DCA's multidivisional efforts in achieving our mission.

Licensing & Collections Divisions

The Licensing Center remains the backbone of our business operations. DCA licenses some 55 categories of businesses, including electronics stores, parking garages, sidewalk cafés—and our newest category: pedicabs. We also do the “front office” licensing of all Department of Health and Mental Hygiene permits. In fiscal year 2007, more than 100,000 people visited the Licensing Center.



In addition to directly serving the public at our Licensing Center, staff help the thousands of New Yorkers who call 311 with DCA-related license inquiries. In fiscal year 2007, staff responded to more than 47,000 311 inquiries for license application packets and license renewal information. Total DCA-related inquiries numbered more than 167,000 in fiscal year 2007.

The Collections Division works with businesses to arrange payment of scale inspection fees, fines, and money awarded to consumers in decisions issued by DCA's independent Administrative Law Judges. To make this experience more efficient and business-friendly, DCA increased payment options, began using plain language principles in business correspondence for greater clarity, and reinforced customer service training.

Consumer Services Division

In fiscal year 2007, DCA merged correspondence, complaints intake, and mediation staff into the new Consumer Services Division. Now, staff who initially receive and process consumer inquiries and complaints work alongside staff who help consumers and businesses resolve disputes for more seamless communication and case management. Last year, this Division responded to more than 48,000 inquiries received via E-mail, mail, 311, and walk-in visits. Staff resolved nearly 7,300 complaints, a 17% increase compared to 2006. Mediators, working with DCA attorneys, obtained more than \$5.3 million in restitution for consumers, a dramatic 45% increase compared to 2006, largely the result of cases involving home improvement contractors.



Staff Profile:

Cecilia Lim, Director of Consumer Services

“I've been with DCA for about a year and a half, and am currently the Director of Consumer Services. Consumers and businesses are the heart of this agency. This past year, internally, we had the opportunity to reorganize as a division, bringing together intake and mediation, and it's been really successful; we've had a chance to review our processes and

make them even better. The members of this division are incredibly dedicated to fighting for the consumer, but we are also very mindful about reaching a fair outcome for businesses. We encourage businesses and consumers to cooperate to resolve complaints, as we cooperate with each other within the division. Realizing that we share the same goals and working cooperatively is the best way to get things done.”

Enforcement Division

DCA enforces the City's Consumer Protection, Weights and Measures, and Licensing laws. Every day in every borough, our inspectors are in the marketplace making sure that businesses do right by the buying public. Operating out of our borough-based offices, staff are cross-trained so that in one inspection they can look for all potential violations in order to alert and educate businesses and, when warranted, issue citations. In fiscal year 2007, DCA conducted its first rotation of Borough Directors since their installation in 2003, bringing fresh perspective but proven leadership to borough operations.



Staff Profile:

J.G. Kennelly, Director of Enforcement

"I've worked here for a little over 22 years. One of our Enforcement division accomplishments is that the DCA's tobacco squad has gotten the compliance rate to almost 90%—the highest it's ever been. We're preventing people from starting to smoke cigarettes, and that's something that you can really be proud of at DCA. In fact, the mayor has visited us twice

because of the Department's success in this area. In general, Enforcement tries to work where we can do the most good and where we can prevent the most harm. We don't need to be out there writing up every nickel and dime violation. We are out there every day and we think we understand businesses best of anybody in this agency because we're out there in those businesses."

DCA's Petroleum Products Squad and Youth Tobacco Enforcement and Prevention Program target the agency's enforcement efforts. Our specialized fuel unit inspects the accuracy and quality of gasoline dispensed at the City's pumps and by home heating oil delivery trucks. DCA's Tobacco Program, which pairs inspectors and undercover minors, inspects essentially every City cigarette retail dealer every year to ensure they do not sell tobacco products to underage kids.

In fiscal year 2007, DCA increased the number of total inspections by 15%, and core inspections—those focused on particular Consumer Protection Law violations—by 20%. Even with more inspections, business compliance continued its upward trend.

Business Compliance Increases

Law	Compliance Rate FY 2007	Compliance Rate FY 2006
License Law	87%	82%
Consumer Protection Law (refund and receipts compliance)	93%	91%
Weights and Measures Law (gasoline pumps)	98%	98%
Weights and Measures Law (fuel trucks)	94%	92%
Inspected stores complying with tobacco regulations	89%	84%
Compliance on follow-up inspection after a previous tobacco violation	91%	86%

Source: Fiscal 2007 Mayor's Management Report

Legal Divisions

Among its many duties, DCA's Legal Services Division issues interpretation letters in response to inquiries about the laws we enforce, litigates major cases—more than 450 last year—negotiates settlements, and monitors advertising for deception. In fiscal year 2007, DCA expanded these core legal services to allow for increased specialization among staff, including attorneys situated directly in the Licensing Center to assist businesses more quickly with their licensing needs.

In November 2006, DCA launched a new Division dedicated to conducting creative and extensive investigatory work. Called Research and Investigations, this Division scrutinizes the marketplace in order to detect—and then proactively tackle—emerging issues of concern. Where DCA has identified industrywide patterns of abuse—debt collection, home improvement contracting, used car sales—Research and Investigations is aggressively devising strategies and marshaling resources to end harmful practices.

Adjudication Division

Businesses cited for violations may choose to settle or to contest the charges by appearing before an Administrative Law Judge at DCA's independent Tribunal. Before any hearing, DCA Settlement Officers meet with business respondents to inform them of the opportunity to pay reduced fines—rather than the maximum that could be imposed, if found guilty—for settling the violation and agreeing to discontinue the illegal activity. These settlement conferences minimize the impact on businesses' time and bottom line, and also streamline DCA's docket of cases. Since the Tribunal instituted this practice, 42% of cases that, in the past, would have gone to hearing instead were settled. Of course, businesses always have the opportunity to present their case before a fair and unbiased judge.



Staff Profile:

Diana Zalph, Director of Adjudication

“My most rewarding endeavor here has been strengthening our use of alternative dispute resolution as an approach that we now try in just about all of our cases. In the past year, we've experimented with some new techniques to help parties make more informed decisions about settlement. When we resolve cases without litigation, everyone benefits, and the parties come away with a more positive feeling about their experience with government.”

External Affairs

External Affairs encompasses DCA's Communications and Marketing, Legislative Affairs, and Community Relations Divisions. Through our participation in community and industry events, our advocacy to add and shed laws for the benefit of buyers and sellers in New York City's marketplace, and our public information tools—311, press, publications, E-newsletters, our website nyc.gov/consumers—DCA strives always to provide timely, accurate information effectively so consumers are empowered and businesses know their responsibilities.



Staff Profile:

Fran Freedman, Associate Commissioner for External Affairs

“The most exciting part of my job, which I've been privileged to hold since last year, is working with such a smart, fun, and professional team. I've been an advocate all my life, as a social worker, as an activist and as an adjunct professor teaching advocacy. Our work at DCA is, to me, the apotheosis of my advocacy commitment to consumers and businesses alike.

Some of the special highlights for me this year were the EITC campaign and the growth of our Citywide Coalition and, of course, my ground floor involvement with the conceptualization and planning for our new Office of Financial Empowerment. Those efforts were enormously exciting and engaged so many of my social work and career skills, and my interests and expertise.”

Finance, Administration, and Technology Divisions

With facilities in four boroughs and a growing staff with varied personnel, procurement, printing and mailing, maintenance, and technological needs, DCA relies on the expertise of our Finance, Administration, and Technology colleagues to keep operations running smoothly.

In fiscal year 2007, for one example, DCA completed several technical upgrades at our Adjudication Division's 66 John Street location, including moving users to DCA's Local Area Network, which staff are able to access faster and more reliably, thanks to the installation of new servers and software.

Office of Financial Empowerment

On December 18, 2006, Mayor Bloomberg announced the creation of the Office of Financial Empowerment at DCA—the very first program to be implemented under the Center for Economic Opportunity and part of the Administration’s innovative efforts to fight poverty in New York City. With a mission aimed expressly at helping to educate, empower, and protect those with low incomes so they can build assets and make the most of their financial resources, DCA’s OFE sees its role as going beyond simply securing benefits or tackling abuses to improving people’s economic circumstances—making it the first municipal program in the nation of its kind.



Housing OFE at DCA is a seamless fit. As natural educators of both consumers and businesses and a conduit to the industries most in need of monitoring, DCA is foremost a government agency that can leverage our regulatory and enforcement capabilities to make a real difference. Four critical initiatives drive the work of OFE:

Protecting New Yorkers with low incomes from unfair and predatory practices.

The Commission on Economic Opportunity reported that exploitive business practices disproportionately impact poor communities. We will target watchdog protection for the most vulnerable working families and individuals through impact litigation, enforcement, advocacy, and outreach aimed specifically in the financial services sector.

Launching and coordinating large-scale public awareness campaigns.

Using the successful EITC Campaign as a model, we will develop coalitions and communication strategies around asset-building and savings products, evolving the message from simply “getting” benefits and credits to which people are entitled to “growing” and “protecting” assets so that New Yorkers with low incomes can truly escape poverty.

Establishing a dynamic network of high-quality financial service providers.

We are hard at work developing a comprehensive audit of the many financial literacy efforts offered Citywide so ultimately we can become a trusted “one-stop shop” for workers with low incomes in selecting high-quality financial service providers using the power of 311 and our website.

Staff Profile:

**Cathie Mahon, Executive Director,
DCA’s Office of Financial Empowerment**

“We’re putting the wheels in motion to create a financial education network that will be the cornerstone of our work. It seeks to coordinate and synchronize the delivery of financial education in the City by bringing together the vast array of financial education providers. The Network will also help us develop best practices, identify gaps, and make

information available and accessible to the public through a new website and 311. It’s going to be a major project and we are very excited to begin rolling it out.”



Identifying and implementing asset-building best practices.

We are actively designing financial empowerment approaches to bring to scale in New York City, with an eye on model programs from around the five boroughs, state, country, and globe.

In June 2007, Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs helped kick off the first major event organized by DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment. A roll-up-the-shirtsleeves working conference, "Asset-Building in the Big Apple" attracted approximately 100 representatives from leading community-based organizations, financial institutions, City agencies, and foundations to identify programs and products to help New Yorkers with low incomes move up the economic ladder. The Feerick Center co-sponsored the event held at Fordham Law School.

The work of DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment is being strongly supported and closely evaluated by the Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity.

DCA's OFE is already formulating new large-scale public awareness campaigns. However, the 2007 EITC Campaign featured many highlights worth mentioning.

2007 EITC Campaign Highlights

- In January, Deputy Mayor Gibbs, Commissioner Mintz, DoITT Commissioner Paul Cosgrave, Finance Commissioner Martha Stark, and Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Guillermo Linares launched the 2007 EITC Campaign at the 311 Customer Service Center. Over the course of the Campaign, calls to 311 about the EITC totaled approximately 30,000, a nearly 40% increase in call volume compared to one year ago.
- At the Campaign's free tax preparation sites, the New York City Coalition helped nearly 30,000 New Yorkers get more than \$50 million in EITC refunds, \$1 million more than in 2006.
- DCA distributed to City agencies, community-based organizations, elected officials, libraries, post offices, and other groups two million bilingual EITC brochures, translated in English and 10 additional languages, including Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu.
- Former President Bill Clinton recorded a 30-second Public Service Announcement about the EITC, which aired on WYNE 91.5 FM and the City's on-hold telephone announcement system. And for the second year, the New York Yankees broadcast the EITC message on their electronic billboard along the Major Deegan Expressway.



Empowering and Protecting Consumers

DCA believes that the essence of a fair transaction is accurate information. This guiding principle underpins the agency's external communications, whether in the form of press events, publications, or public hearings. DCA also believes that we achieve the broadest positive impact in the marketplace when we apply our resources where the greatest harm is being done to the greatest number and we can offer the most help.

Helping Homeowners

Consistently topping the complaints we field from consumers are unlicensed and unscrupulous home improvement contractors. In fiscal year 2007, DCA targeted aggressive and innovative approaches to curb the trend. Knowing that a license affords DCA greater recourse in protecting homeowners, the Department began offering businesses cited for unlicensed activity an opportunity to pay reduced fines in exchange for becoming licensed and settling all outstanding consumer complaints. The approach is working. In the last year alone, DCA saw a 24% growth in licensed home improvement contractors. In August 2006, at a forum in Brooklyn, DCA convened for the first time homeowners and home improvement contractors to discuss effective ways to work together. Colleagues from City, state, and federal agencies, as well as representatives from contracting associations participated in this groundbreaking exchange. In March 2007, DCA, along with the Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator, spearheaded an unprecedented "meeting of the minds" by bringing together representatives from City and state agencies to identify and execute a regional approach to enforcement efforts.



Staff Profile:

Jordan Cohen, Staff Counsel

"This past year, I worked on a case where more than 120 homeowners were entitled to more than \$600,000 back from a home improvement contractor. We were able to secure an agreement where the Department's home improvement contractor trust fund is paying these consumers the money that was wrongfully taken from them. Receiving thank you phone calls and letters from consumers who have received

their restitution checks has been wonderful. It is great to see the protections the Department has in place for consumers, in action."

Putting Debt Collectors on Notice

DCA's June 2006 public hearing on debt collection identified "debt buyers," companies that buy default debt in bulk and then try to collect, as one of the factors contributing to the 70% spike in complaints filed with us from 2004 to 2006. In March 2007, DCA warned debt buyers that they must be licensed, sending a strong message to the industry. DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment is expanding the agency's efforts in a highly targeted way, monitoring against abuses in communities with low incomes and educating vulnerable working families and individuals to be more financially empowered.



Staff Profile: **Marla Tepper, General Counsel**

“I’ve worked for DCA since November 2005 and my job is consistently challenging and rewarding. I love using my legal skills to guide the agency’s legal agenda so that we can help consumers and businesses in New York City. As General Counsel, I’m charged with the responsibility of overseeing all the agency’s legal work, including our litigation and our interpretation of regulations. One of the biggest and most

satisfying challenges is to design a strategy that is creative and effective and that addresses emerging consumer problems. DCA has a great legal team. Working with all the other Divisions in the agency, we are really able to accomplish a lot.”

Curbing Deceptive Car Dealers

In April 2007, as the culmination of investigations into car dealerships begun last spring, DCA charged eight businesses with engaging in a pattern of deceptive sales practices, including car sweepstakes scams. Currently, the agency is pursuing substantial relief for more than 150 consumers, as well as maximum fines and penalties.

Targeting Employment Agency Scams

In two separate, though equally significant settlement agreements, DCA secured a total of \$35,000 for distribution to more than 200 consumers defrauded by employment agencies that ran advertisements for jobs that did not exist and refused to refund advance fees as part of a pattern of deception targeting non-English-speaking consumers. Both agencies surrendered their licenses, with one permanently barred from operating an employment agency in New York City.

Other Major Legal Settlements

In May 2007, a major mattress retailer agreed to pay \$200,000 in consumer restitution and penalties and to establish new policies to ensure compliance with local and state laws. The Department charged that the retailer engaged in deceptive and unfair sales practices, including exchanging defective items with equally defective items and failing to deliver items when scheduled. Charges stemmed from an extensive investigation involving nearly 300 consumer complainants.

In December 2006, a California attorney agreed to pay consumer restitution and fines totaling \$300,000 and to comply fully with the City’s Consumer Protection Law for airing misleading ads about its tax services on New York City stations. Out of this amount, DCA is reimbursing defrauded New Yorkers to the tune of \$200,000.

DCA also partners with a variety of organizations to coordinate outreach to specific consumers and issue alerts.

Encouraging New Yorkers to Save

During the tax season, the New York City Coalition helped nearly 30,000 New Yorkers get more than \$50 million in Earned Income Tax Credit refunds at free tax filing sites part of the DCA-coordinated EITC Campaign; Citywide, the Campaign’s efforts bring \$2 billion in refunds into communities. In June, DCA’s Office of Financial Empowerment convened its first major symposium to create programs that go beyond



simply helping people get back money, but encourage saving to advance their economic positions. Approximately 100 representatives from leading community-based organizations, financial institutions, City agencies, and foundations participated in this dynamic exchange of ideas.

Joining Forces to Educate City Residents and Visitors

DCA often participates in timely events on timely topics with sister agencies. During Construction Safety Week in May 2007, organized by the Department of Buildings, DCA took part in several events Citywide, offering valuable tips to homeowners when hiring a home improvement contractor. In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, DCA contributed consumer protection tips for a brochure the U.S. Navy produced for sailors visiting the Big Apple during Fleet Week. DCA staff also participated in Veterans' Affairs' 2nd Annual Fleet Week Job, Education, & Information Fair, distributing hundreds of our educational brochures.

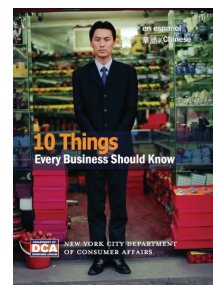
Facilitating Fair Business Practices

In our dealings with New York City businesses, DCA's guiding principle is simple and unwavering: we believe education supported by fair enforcement is the best way to ensure compliance. From the moment an applicant arrives at DCA's Licensing Center, our educational efforts begin, not only to help businesses get licensed, but to do right by all consumers, residents and visitors alike.

Business Education

For the more than 100,000 people who visit DCA's Licensing Center annually, we boiled down what we do—and, equally important, what businesses need to know—into a five-minute educational video with Spanish subtitles. Created in partnership with NYC Media Group, the video is but one critical tool in alerting businesses that DCA is dedicated to helping them do the right thing.

Our business guides are another critical tool, with two of our most popular—*What Businesses Need to Know* and *Ten Things Every Business Should Know*—translated into multiple languages. Often, DCA creates new materials for the business categories we license to address issues raised by our inspectors. Last summer, for example, DCA inspectors distributed a new palm card to licensed and unlicensed sidewalk cafés highlighting important regulations and strongly advising restaurants operating illegal outdoor cafés to obtain a license.



Our educational efforts are not confined to communications tools alone, but door-to-door, face-to-face conversations. Every day in their dealings with businesses our inspectors employ such a personal yet professional approach. Once each year, however, Departmental staff agencywide, joined by elected officials and representatives from the Department of Small Business Services and community and business groups, blanket neighborhoods in the five boroughs as part of "Business Education Day," pointing out violations and issuing advice—not citations—on how businesses can correct problems to be in compliance with City laws.

Beyond “Business Education Day,” DCA often works outside our walls with other organizations to educate New York’s businesses.

Helping Consumers Shop Smart during the Holiday Season

In November 2006, DCA partnered with NYC & Company and the New York City BID Managers Association to distribute wallet-size information cards—coined “gift cards”—highlighting important holiday shopping tips at NYC & Company’s Official Visitor Information Center in Midtown Manhattan. City businesses received flyers with more detailed information to provide their customers during the holiday shopping season.

Ensuring Scale Accuracy

DCA joined forces with Business Integrity Commission market inspectors to test the more than 100 weighing devices at the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center, which includes The New Fulton Fish Market. Inspectors issued violations when necessary, educating those merchants in violation how to be compliant.



Promoting the City’s Booming Sidewalk Cafés

To promote the City’s vibrant sidewalk café industry, DCA, in partnership with the New York State Restaurant Association, hosted the “2nd Annual Sidewalk Café Drink Mix-Off” in May 2007 at The Institute of Culinary Education. Sidewalk cafés submitted recipes, with winners and runners-up receiving a specially designed sidewalk café logo to display in their windows. DCA mailed a postcard to licensees and the tourism industry alerting them to the list of legally operating sidewalk cafés available on DCA’s website.

In addition to our efforts educating businesses, DCA continually examines our processes, procedures, and services to ensure that we are helping businesses most efficiently and effectively.

Alternative to Maximum Fines

As part of a new strategy to discourage unlicensed activity, DCA began offering home improvement contractors cited for operating illegally the opportunity to pay reduced fines in exchange for becoming licensed and resolving all outstanding complaints. Contractors who choose to do the right thing can avoid maximum penalties.

Eased Licensing Process

In fiscal year 2007, DCA, working with the Department of Buildings, helped to ease the licensing process for operators of temporary amusement rides used at street fairs and other events. For those operators that provide timely and proper notification to the community, the City reduced the time required to perform inspections and process license applications to 12 days.



Translation Assistance

Using Language Line, a telephone-based translation service with 170 available languages, DCA staff can help businesses complete the licensing process, mediate complaints between consumers and businesses, and serve justice by removing language barriers for all parties involved in an administrative hearing.

Efficient, Accountable, Customer-Friendly Operations

Whether helping a business seeking a license or a consumer seeking help with a complaint, DCA believes that we get the best results when we are professional, courteous, and helpful.

Enhanced Service for New License Applicants

In October 2006, DCA launched a pilot program on our website to help businesses obtain new licenses more easily and quickly using 2-D bar code technology. This innovation, the product of a collaboration with the Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications and the software company, Adobe, has resulted in tremendous efficiencies, speeding up the licensing process and eliminating keystroke errors.

Licensing Center Ombudsman

In fiscal year 2007, DCA created a formal Ombudsman position in the Licensing Center to enhance our customer service. A roving troubleshooter, our Ombudsman helps applicants better understand the licensing and business process, most critically assisting them in understanding what documents they need from other agencies, and how to get them. Our Ombudsman also expedites and resolves any problems that arise in the Licensing Center.



Staff Profile:

Alvin Espinosa, Ombudsman

“This year, being promoted to the Licensing Center’s Ombudsman position and helping make the new Pedicab license process go smoothly were big highlights for me. The Ombudsman’s position requires a lot of knowledge about every license we have here at DCA. I get a lot of questions every single day that have never been asked and to be able to answer them feels pretty good.”

Quick Customer Service

Every year, DCA’s Licensing Center staff serve an ever-increasing volume of customers while keeping wait time consistently low. In fiscal year 2007, the average wait time from the moment visitors checked in at the Reception Desk to the moment they were called to a Customer Service window was only 10 minutes.

Improved Collection Practices

In an effort to make our collection practices more efficient, DCA has provided additional training for collectors, used plain language in correspondence to businesses, and streamlined and standardized processes, the result: enhanced operations and dealings with businesses.

Contact Us

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