

CONSUMER AFFAIRS ANNOUNCES OUT-OF-TOWN TOUR COMPANIES NOW REQUIRED TO USE ONLY LICENSED TOUR GUIDES

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DCA to List All Licensed Tour Guides Online, Giving Special Recognition to Guides with Exemplary Scores on New Licensing Exam

New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra and City Councilman and Consumer Affairs Committee Chairman Philip Reed, today announced out-of-town companies conducting paid tours within New York City must employ a tour guide licensed by the DCA. In addition beginning in April 2004, the DCA will begin listing all licensed tour guides online, giving special recognition to guides who pass the new licensing exam with a score of 120 or more. Last spring, the DCA instituted a new, comprehensive and challenging licensing exam for the City's tour guides.

"All visitors to New York City deserve an accurate and colorful tour," said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. "The law requires that out-of-town companies conducting tours within the City have to use a licensed guide who knows the lay of the land. This ensures that millions of tourists who visit each year, will get both educational and fun tours and therefore will be more likely to come back."

"As tourists return in large numbers to the City, I commend the DCA for recognizing the importance of out-of-town companies using licensed tour guides," said Council Member Philip Reed. "The DCA has found a great way to balance giving credit to veteran New York City tour guides, who have superb knowledge of the city, as well as resolving the problem of out-of town tour guides. Either way, this will enhance the experience of people coming to visit New York, which is a good thing for everyone."

"New York City tour guides are an integral part of the City's tourism industry, welcoming millions of visitors each year," said Cristyne L. Nicholas, president & CEO of NYC & Company, the city's official tourism marketing organization. "By making sure every tour company employs a licensed guide further encourages the success of the City's \$21-billion tourism industry."

"Having a listing online will make it much easier for companies to find good, licensed tour guides," said Pete Pantuso, President and CEO of the American Bus Association. "What's good for the tourists is always good for the tourism business."

By law, all new tour guides must take an exam when applying for a license to test their knowledge of historic or public points of interest in and about the City.

Licensed tour guides who pass the new licensing exam with an exemplary score of a 120 or higher will receive special recognition on the DCA web site, and will be part of an annual alert to NYC & Co. and national tour companies. Guides applying for a license for the first time must take the new test and pass with a score of 97 out of 150, reflecting the average grade of the first few hundred test takers. Veteran tour guides - any guide who was licensed before May 17, 2003 - will no longer be required to take the new licensing exam because of their extensive experience and successful passage of a previous exam. However, any veteran guide who chooses to take the new exam and receives a score of 120 or higher will be included among those who receive special commendation.

DCA enforces the Consumer Protection Law, as well as other related City and State laws, at thousands of businesses throughout New York City. DCA licenses more than 60,000 businesses in 55 different categories in New York City and educates both consumers and businesses alike through free community seminars, licensing forums, and other informational materials.

To file a complaint or for more information, call 311 or go online at www.nyc.gov/consumers