

Mayor to bodegas: Stop blowing smoke over tax

By **LISA L. COLANGELO**
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Mayor Bloomberg infuriated bodega owners yesterday by dismissing complaints that his cigarette tax is killing their businesses.

"I just find it inconceivable that you could equate people's lives — particularly children that buy cigarettes in bodegas — with a minor economic issue," he said yesterday. "Let's get serious!"

In July, Bloomberg boosted the cigarette tax to \$1.50 per pack. He's also proposed a bill to ban smoking in all workplaces — including bars.

Jose Fernandez of the Bodega Owners Association called the mayor an "enemy of minority-owned businesses" and "a traitor."



Mayor Bloomberg

borhood Retail Alliance, said the tax is proving to be a loser for bodega owners and city coffers.

Lipsky charged the city is holding back information that shows revenues from the tax have plummeted since it was enacted. In July, the city picked up \$23 million in revenues from the tax.

Figures for September were not available yesterday, but Bloomberg spokesman Jordan Barowitz said the city was "on target" to meet its annual projection of \$125 million.

"You believe revenue numbers from these people — the tobacco industry — who told you cigarette smoking is good for you?" Barowitz said.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg's war against tobacco took another turn when City Council Minority Leader James Oddo tried to