

The Sun

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2003

FOR HOME DELIVERY 1-866-

A Better Way To Deal With Garbage

Restaurants and small grocers, still reeling from Bloomberg's cigarette initiatives, are about to receive another blow. As Julia Levy reported in *The New York Sun* on August 18, the New York City Business Integrity Commission is set to raise price caps on garbage pickups, a move that is allegedly necessary to save sanitation companies. This threatens to elevate costs for businesses that create heavy organic waste, like bodegas and delis already operating on small profit margins.

The president of Manhattan, C. Virginia Fields, along with a handful of city council members, supports a simple solution to this problem. Garbage disposals, much like the ones found in kitchens, can grind this organic waste and send it to the sewers. This would not only relieve stores and restaurants of high disposal costs, but it would get their unsightly garbage off sidewalks, where it feeds disease-carrying rats.

Mayor Giuliani lifted a decades-old ban on domestic food waste disposals in 1997, with the blessing of the New York Department of Environmental Protection. But the same agency is balking at allowing businesses to shunt their organic waste below

ground, arguing that the nitrogen content in the sewers would become environmentally dangerous, and could cost up to \$12 million more a year in wastewater processing.

As these pages reported in August, by the DEP's own estimation commercial food disposals would only increase nitrogen content in the sewers by 8.8%. Yet the \$12 million in processing represents a 30% increase in cost. Given that when Giuliani pushed for domestic food disposals, the DEP performed a 21-month investigation, some clarification of these numbers is in order, especially since cities like Philadelphia already practice the new system.

If, as the DEP warns, the city is already suffering from spikes in nitrogen counts that threaten federal review, maybe it is time to retrofit the city's waste treatment plants. Maybe the funding could be found by halting the plan to raid the taxpayers for \$20 million to house lemurs in the Bronx Zoo. At least such a plan would help the owners of small businesses. In addition, such a plan would get the food garbage off the streets and begin the war on rats that Hizzoner has championed.