



## City to street vendors: Urine big trouble

By JEREMY OLSHAN

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Street vendors be warned: Take a bathroom break, and it may be your business that gets flushed down the toilet.

That's what happened to Shiraj Islam, a nut vendor for 12 years, who suddenly found himself without a livelihood.

Health inspectors, cracking down on unattended vendor carts across the city, revoked his permit last week when a bathroom emergency forced him to leave his stand in lower Manhattan.

"Everybody has to go sometimes," Islam, 42, who had been a fixture near J&R Music World, told The Post.

"Now, I am losing a lot of money. I have a wife and four children, and I have been sick."

Leaving a food cart unattended -- even for a minute -- is a violation of revised city health codes that went into effect Jan. 1, sparking the crackdown.

Advocates with the Street Vendor Project said Islam's permit seizure was a first for the city. The Health Department disputed that, although it said it didn't have any hard numbers on how many other permits had been seized.

Under the law, street-sold hot dogs, pretzels and nuts become "imminent health hazards" the moment the carts are abandoned because the food could be contaminated.

Normally, Islam would have a friend watch the cart during the one or two bathroom breaks he took each day, but since he was diagnosed with a tumor on his colon, the frequency of his trips to the toilet have increased.

Islam's cart is dropped off each day two blocks away from the electronics and music store on Park Row, but the veteran vendor said that on that day, as he went to haul it to its usual spot in front of the shop, he knew after walking 10 feet that he wasn't going to make it without a pit stop.

"My stomach was feeling very bad," he said. "I went into a pizza place on Fulton Street where they know me, but there was a line."

Islam said he waited and used the restroom, but "when I returned [to the cart] 15 minutes later, the decal [permit] was gone."

Islam cannot reapply for his permit for at least 10 days and, according to Sean Basinski, of the Street Vendor Project, it could take close to a month to be back in business.

"All they do is come up with rules to harass small-business owners," Basinski said. "The Health Department should be just as concerned with the health of street vendors as anyone else."

Health officials contend that Islam had left his cart unattended for at least 30 minutes.

"There are a number of reasons why we consider this a pretty serious thing," Associate Commissioner Elliott Marcus said.

"One: Someone could tamper with the food, and you would never know it. And two: People sometimes park their carts overnight. This cart was in the roadway, wasn't on the sidewalk."

Marcus said inspectors typically give vendors a 15- to 20-minute grace period. This is a temporary suspension, he said.

But Islam said the suspension is an undue hardship on his family, especially as his medical expenses mount.

"I have had my permit for 12 years, and the inspectors always say my cart is clean and good," he said.

Islam noted that he hadn't even made it to his spot on the day his permit was taken.

"I was not feeling well and was probably going to go home that day," he said.  
"Now I am stuck at home."

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