

**Picture the Homeless  
Canners' Survey: Summary of Preliminary Results  
April 13, 2005**

**Methodology**

The Canners' survey was conducted predominantly in Manhattan during the months of February, March and April of 2005. Fifty-three canners were interviewed at random, primarily on the street while picking up or while cashing in their recyclables at supermarkets, or redemption centers.

The survey instrument was developed by members of the Canners' Committee at Picture the Homeless to document the prevalence of violations by supermarkets and drug stores of the New York State Bottle Bill. Canners committee members conducted the surveys in the form of a guided interview, with the majority of interviews conducted by one surveyor.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this survey and report, the term "canners" refers to people who collect cans, bottles and/or plastics for the 5 cent deposit

**Findings**

145 distinct supermarket complaints were documented, several of which referred to the same stores. 77 unduplicated supermarkets or drug stores with verifiable addresses were identified. The survey predominantly documented violations of the Bottle law, but also provides insight about a range of harassing practices that supermarkets and drug stores illegally employ against canners.

- 73 of the 77 identified supermarkets were found to be in violation of the New York State Bottle Law.
- 68 of the 77 were in violation of the legal minimum limit of 240 recyclables per person per day (worth \$12.00)
- Associated and Gristedes were the worst offenders, accepting on average 50 pieces (worth only \$2.50 to the canner who must then continue hauling his/her load to cash in).
- Gristedes tops the list with 31 complaints covering 21 different stores, followed by Associated with 27 complaints covering 14 different stores and Food Emporium with 18 complaints covering 9 different stores.
- Stores with malfunctioning automatic redemption machines were in violation by not providing a staff person to assist canners.
- Stores imposed unlawful limits for accepting glass containers, or established other unlawful procedures such as requiring canners to have their picture taken, before allowing him/her to cash in, demanding purchase receipts, restricting the hours or days canners could redeem, or requiring boxes or clear bags.
- Several stores force canners to wait for up to 4 hours to redeem recyclables.
- Other forms of harassment include verbal abuse by supermarket employees

### **Significance of Findings**

The Canners survey represents only a fraction of the total number of stores in NYC that are in violation of the NYS Bottle Law and is based on a limited sample of the total number of New Yorkers who collect cans, bottles and plastics. The nearly universal reports of violations of the Bottle Law by supermarkets and drug stores revealed by this small sample however indicate that action to strengthen enforcement of the current law is necessary.

Many canners have developed routines and travel routes that circumvent the lawbreaking supermarkets and drug stores in order to avoid daily hassles in the course of carrying out their work. Certain stores are known as consistent violators (such as Gristedes, Associated, Fine Fare, Pioneer) and since the canners' objective is to cash in their recyclables in order to earn a living, many will not attempt to cash in at stores which violate the Bottle Law or otherwise abuse canners. The word spreads quickly among canners, which are the few law-abiding stores and which stores violated their rights or give them a "hard time". Alternative routes to seek out compliant supermarkets or redemption centers force canners to travel long distances by foot or public transportation – creating a hardship for canners by taking a lot of time as well as putting them in the position of being harassed by police (NYPD and MTA) for having carts or bags of cans on sidewalks, trains or other public spaces.

### **Canners' Committee at Picture the Homeless**

The Canners' Committee at Picture the Homeless is led by canners and organizes to build power as a workforce, to assure that the legal rights of canners are enforced and expanded, to improve working conditions and to increase respect for the environmental contributions of their work.



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