

 **The Long-Islander**

# HALF HOLLOW HILLS

**NEWSPAPER**



**LONG ISLANDER NEWSPAPERS  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS/MEDIA  
BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

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VOLUME ELEVEN, ISSUE 47

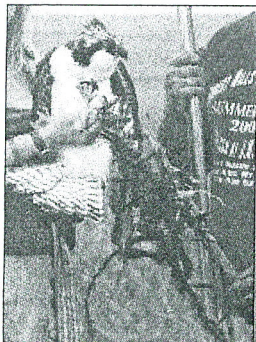
THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 2009

16 PAGES 75¢

TOWN OF HUNTINGTON

## Toughening Illegal Dumping Penalties

*Companies to lose license to do business if caught improperly disposing of trash*



**Dumping can harm wildlife. Above, members of the Huntington Audubon Society rescue an osprey that got caught in a fishing line, balloon string and other debris.**



By **Tricia Arend**

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Businesses considering the illegal dumping of garbage, construction debris and other refuse along roadways, in parks and in public places may now have a reason to reconsider. Suffolk County recently passed legislation calling for tougher penalties for county-licensed businesses caught dumping illegally in Suffolk.

The anti-dumping legislation, sponsored by Legislator Steven Stern (D-Dix Hills), authorizes the Suffolk County Department of Consumer Affairs to revoke the licenses of businesses caught illegally dumping.

Currently the penalty for dumping is a fine that ranges up to a few hundred dollars, Stern said. Passing legislation that will affect the ability of a company to do business in Suffolk County will have a much broader, more meaningful impact, he believes.

"Litter along our roadways continues to be a challenge. What I've seen personally is that much of the trash that ends up alongside the roadways comes from commercial vehicles. This legislation is a way for Suffolk to hopefully have a deterrent effect on those companies whose employees are part of the problem, because a fine is just part of the cost of doing business for many companies," Stern said.

The legislation is far-reaching in that it will apply countywide and encompasses dumping on all land and

within all water in Suffolk County. It will also apply immediately and in every instance, Stern said, enabling the Commissioner to revoke a company's license to do business in the county on a first offense, theoretically even for a circumstance in which a driver is caught chucking a beverage cup onto a roadway while driving.

Just four months ago, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation officials caught and fined a Nassau company for illegally dumping on Edgewood land. According to Denis Byrne, President of Friends of the Edgewood Preserve, an organization whose mission is to improve and maintain the 813-acre rare pitch pine scrub-oak state nature preserve, Stern's legislation is a timely action and a positive way to pose a serious threat to contractors considering illegal dumping.

"Illegal dumping is a problem in all vacant land but definitely in parks, preserves and open spaces where usage is not necessarily real heavy," he said. "Companies would get rid of debris to avoid dumping fees. In the past they would look at fines as the cost of doing business, and nowadays, with the new law, they'll look at it and not use that as a low cost option."

When businesses avoid the cost of legal disposal and make the financial decision to risk a small fine by illegally dumping, the public is paying the price for the environmental cleanup, added Jessica Helm, Conservation Chair for the Long Island Sierra Club.

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# *Dumping laws tighten*

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“Suffolk County’s new anti-dumping legislation ends this toxic loophole and will greatly reduce the cost of illegal dumping to the tax paying public,” Helm said.

Dumping is not only a quality of life issue but also threatens the well being of the environment and local wildlife, said Stella Miller, President of the Huntington Audubon Society and a volunteer with Volunteers for Wildlife.

When improperly disposed of, toxins can sink into the soil and waterways, working their way into the oceans, Miller said, and certain materials can take decades to break down – while others may

never disintegrate at all.

String and fishing lines can wrap around birds’ legs and necks; hooks and sharp objects can get lodged in animals’ throats or cut feet; open containers and six-pack holders become death traps; and plastic bags can strangle and choke sea creatures after floating into waterways, she said.

“Human beings need to stop and think about how profoundly their actions can impact the natural world around us,” Miller said. “Trash is an urgent problem that must be addressed and dealt with. Personally, I am all for toughening the laws that protect the environment and the wildlife we share our world with.”