

NEWS FROM Legislator

Lou D'Amaro



SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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New County Laws Banning Artificial Trans Fats and Requiring Menu Calorie Disclosures in Restaurants Take Effect

Both Measures Designed to Improve Health of Suffolk Diners

(HUNTINGTON STATION, NY...November 9, 2010) – Two new consumer-friendly laws enabling local diners to both make more informed menu choices when eating out and to feel confident that the food they are being served is artificial trans fat free recently went into effect throughout Suffolk County.

Originally approved by the Suffolk County Legislature in early 2009, the two laws, which were phased in over the past 18 months by the Suffolk County Board of Health, are an important step toward enhancing the County's ongoing efforts to promote health and fitness and to combat obesity, according to Legislator Lou D'Amaro (D-Huntington Station) who drafted, sponsored and spearheaded the proposals.

"These initiatives go a long way toward reducing a host of serious health problems," said Legislator D'Amaro. "Scientific studies have clearly established a direct link between coronary heart disease, diabetes, and trans fats, so banning this dangerous food additive fulfills the government's obligation to do all it can to protect public health. In addition, caloric content postings provide each of us with a valuable tool in our anti-obesity efforts because it enables us to make informed choices about what we eat, especially at fast food restaurants."

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Effective October 28, 2010, all chain restaurants in Suffolk County with at least 15 locations nationwide must prominently post the caloric contents of their foods on any and all menus, including sign menus, drive through boards and menus distributed off-premises. The caloric content must be as prominently displayed as the food item itself and also be listed in close proximity to the food item's name, picture, and price. All displays are to be reviewed and approved by the Suffolk County Bureau of Public Health Protection, which will regularly check restaurants to confirm compliance.

"Posting caloric content on chain restaurant menus makes this important health related information readily available to consumers at the time of decision," said D'Amaro. "Diners may think twice about a 600 calorie meal, if there is a 300 calorie alternative right next to it on the menu. In addition, posting this information could ultimately have the side benefit of encouraging restaurants to reduce the caloric content of their foods and beverages."

Artificial trans fats are typically found in additives like vegetable shortening, hard margarine and partially hydrogenated oils, which are often used in the food preparation process by restaurants and other food establishments. Studies estimate that having as few as 40 calories of trans fat a day can boost the risk of a heart attack by 23 percent. A fast food meal of chicken nuggets and French fries, if prepared with artificial trans fat, can easily contain more than 100 calories of the substance.

The artificial trans fat ban is being phased in to allow ample time for restaurants and bakeries to come in compliance without sacrificing taste or quality. The first phase, which took effect on October 28th, bans the use of artificial trans fats in oils, shortenings and margarines that are used for frying and in spreads. Oils and shortenings used for deep frying of yeast or cake batter must be artificial trans fat free by October 28, 2011, as must all other foods served in food establishments that are monitored by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services, including delicatessens and restaurants. Factory pre-packaged foods served in these establishments are exempt.

D'Amaro praised local Suffolk County eating establishments for their willingness and interest to conform to the new laws and said he does not anticipate any problems enforcing the statutes. He cited studies by New York City officials who said their own ban added less than 15 minutes to the average food establishment inspection and has a 98% compliance rate.

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“When I initially sponsored the legislation, I was extremely encouraged by the high rate of compliance in other jurisdictions and am confident that Suffolk County restaurants will be equally cooperative,” D’Amaro said. “Given the fact that the average American eats 4.7 pounds of trans fats each year, and more than 500,000 people die of coronary heart disease annually, the extra effort to come into compliance and the extra few minutes of inspection time are certainly warranted.”

Caloric content postings are equally important. It is widely recognized that excessive caloric intake leads directly to obesity and a host of other health problems. Although consumers have a right to accurate nutritional information when deciding which foods and beverages to ingest, most chain restaurants do not make caloric content information readily available to consumers when they order.

“Calorie count is a legitimate means of weight loss and weight management, as it has been reported that just a reduction in daily intake by 100 calories can lead to meaningful weight loss,” said D’Amaro. “This proposal, together with the artificial trans fat ban, represents the wave of the future for municipalities in their fight against obesity and heart disease. These significant health problems can not only result in the sickness and death of loved ones, but also heavily burden the health care system and impose substantial costs on taxpayers. This is why it is imperative for the County to remain proactive in promoting healthy and nutritional proposals.”

Consumers who notice any chain restaurants that are failing to post the required calorie information, or who suspect that neighborhood eating establishments may not be in compliance with the first phase of the artificial trans fat ban, are urged to report these observations by contacting the Suffolk County Bureau of Public Health at (631) 852-5999 .

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Suffolk County Legislator Lou D’Amaro (D-Huntington Station) represents the 17th Legislative District, which includes parts of North Babylon, Deer Park, Dix Hills, Melville, West Hills, Huntington, South Huntington, and Huntington Station. He is Chairman of the Ways and Means committee, Vice-Chairman of the Environment, Planning and Agriculture committee and Vice-Chairman of the Budget and Finance committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.

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D'Amaro's Caloric Posting Law and Artificial Trans Fat Ban Take Effect

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As sponsor Legislator Lou D'Amaro, at right, and representatives from the Dolan Family Health Center and the American Cancer Society, back row, look on, County Executive Steve Levy signs into law two bills that will phase out artificial trans fats in Suffolk County eating establishments and mandate the posting of calorie counts on chain restaurant menus in the County.

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