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Vendors like Donald Hart hawk virtually anything they can sell for a buck near Ground Zero. Photo by Ron Antonelli/Daily News

Meet Ground Zero vultures

Cheesy vendors tarnish sacred site

A NO-SELL ZONE near Ground Zero teems with dozens of vendors hawking cheesy World Trade Center souvenirs and fake designer handbags — even though it's illegal.

A report by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer found 156 vendors — an average of more than 15 per day — on the somber streets during a recent 11-day stretch.

"Ground Zero and the memory of that day deserve dignity and respect," Stringer said. "Hawking counterfeit goods and creating a carnival-like atmosphere is just not right."

Stringer said his staff found more than 50 peddlers in one afternoon in the five block area where vending is prohibited. The report, obtained exclusive-

EXCLUSIVE
BY ANDREW S. GARIB
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DAILY NEWS WRITERS

ly by the Daily News, will be made public today.

The News found a dozen peddlers on a recent afternoon selling 9/11 hats and T-shirts, World Trade Center crystal paper weights, Obama and McCain gear and "I ♥ NY" sweaters in the restricted zone.

"How come the authorities can't stand up and say, 'You can't do that?'" visitor Cheryl Lovelace asked as she gazed at the sacred site.

Stringer said enforcement of the state law enacted to respect the memory of 9/11 was spotty at best.

Vendors — most of whom were unaware of or not concerned about the law — said they were just trying to earn an honest living.



"We're not stealing stuff," said Abdul Kader, 24, of the Bronx. "We're just making a living, and we have a license."

Kader, selling WTC knickknacks and NYPD caps, manned a table with Vietnam veteran Donald Hart.

"When the date rolls around, they start the harassment," Hart said, noting increased enforcement around Sept. 11. "We've been here for years."

Cops came every day, sometimes twice, and gave them 10 minutes to clear out, Hart said.

The survey found that more than half of the vendors sold merchandise — a category that includes clothing and trinkets.

Of those, 93% of the vendors sold counterfeit goods.

The rest sold photos, books and written materials that are protected under the First Amendment. That's legal, as long as the sellers are walking around.

"I'm hoping the report will show the extent of the illegal activity," Stringer said, calling for increased enforcement and signs to make vendors aware of the no-sell zone's boundaries.

A 42-year-old vendor, who identified herself as "Lamb," said she could make about \$400 on a good day.

"They come here every day; sometimes they give you a ticket," she said, adding that she simply returns the next day.

Stringer likened the first-offense fine to a "vending fee."

"It's \$50 for a first offense, but there's no mechanism to say, 'Wait, that's an eighth or 10th offense,'" he said.

Elley Hallford, a 40-year-old tourist from Ireland, said she almost stayed away because of the vendors.

"I knew I would see this and it would upset me," she said. "It's a sad thing that they're making money off a tragedy."

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