

ROAD TEST
STINKY TOWN



Summer, when the city becomes a giant convection oven, is smell season, so its opening day, coming as it did earlier this spring, before the recent cold snap, was something of a surprise. The mercury shot up above eighty, and all across the city long-dormant stench began to stir, reminding New Yorkers that it will soon be time to employ their preferred odor-avoidance techniques: nose-holding, mouth-breathing, the strategic sniffing of a packet of mints.

Last year, Patus, an Israeli company, began marketing a clear gel called Odorscreen. Ilan Shatz, one of Patus's founders, had been in New York on business shortly after 9/11, and heard that recovery workers were complaining about the terrible smell at Ground Zero. Some workers had taken to spreading Vicks VapoRub under their noses. Odorscreen is applied in a similar fashion, but, rather than mask odors, as air fresheners and perfumes do, it temporarily alters the smell receptors in the nose, so the user perceives only the soothing scent of vanilla. (Or, in Asian markets, green tea: Patus is considering culture-specific Odorscreen formulas.) One of Patus's first clients was Zaka, the Israeli group that recovers bodies and body parts at the sites of accidents and bombings. This winter, after the tsunami in Asia, Patus distributed Odorscreen packets to relief workers there. These are far graver situations, surely, than the olfactory hazards of summer in the city, but Patus envisions consumer applications for Odorscreen, too, and New York is high on the company's list of stinky target markets.

Will it make it here? On that first smelly day, an independent expert was called in. Rich Anderson, a city sanitation worker from Bay Ridge, who spends his days picking up the garbage of Hell's Kitchen and Chelsea, agreed to give Odorscreen a whirl during his off hours.

The first stop was the Fulton Fish Market. "It should be pretty nasty right now," he said as he sat in his car, applying the gel. A pine-tree-shaped air freshener



"Congressman, you need a junket."

dangled from the rearview mirror. Anderson, who has a sturdy-looking nose, reviewed his olfactory biography. Earliest smell-memory: the bakeries of Bay Ridge on Sunday mornings. Pet peeve: freshly applied asphalt. ("Man, that stuff stinks!")

He stepped outside. The market was closed for the day, but a fishiness lingered. "They clean this place up and they hose it down, but you can never get that smell out," Anderson said. He approached some pallets. "All the fish guts soak into the wood," he explained. He bent over a pallet and began to sniff. A security guard came over. "Sanitation. I'm doing a survey," Anderson said with authority, and the guard retreated. Anderson bent down again—a few more long sniffs—then said, "This stuff works pretty good."

Later, after driving through crowded Chinatown streets with his window down ("Smell it! Smell the air!"), Anderson parked near the Manhattan Bridge and made his way on foot to the vaulted areas beneath the overpass. "This is where at night everyone—if you're going to put it in the paper—*urinates*," he said. "Homeless people, people getting out of the bars nearby, people in cars getting onto the main entrance to the bridge... Smell it?" Yes.

"A fishy smell, the smell of Chinese food, garbage, street, stagnant water, urine," he went on. "Everything mixes together. But it's hard to detect now with this stuff on." He stopped to sniff at a dirty section of drainage pipe under the bridge. An elderly Chinese couple, seated behind a card table, eyed him with suspicion. "I can't smell anything but vanilla," he said.

Anderson arrived at the Gansevoort meat market just as a private sanitation truck pulled up. Two workers jumped out and began moving red buckets onto a loader. Ernest Moore, the driver, a wiry, intense man, wearing yellow rubber gloves and a gold hoop earring, got out.

"We're looking for rotting flesh," Anderson informed him.

Moore grinned fatly. "I got some smelly meat," he said, gesturing to the truck behind him. "Some days, you look inside those barrels and there's nothing but white, creeping and crawling." He shook his shoulders, in imitation of writhing maggots. He took an Odorscreen sample for later use, but he appeared skeptical. "The city doesn't bother me," he said. "Same smells, different day, you know what I mean?"

—Field Maloney