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Thursday, 02 July 2009 16:49

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - National health reports conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that the average American woman is 5'4" in height, weighs approximately 164 pounds, and wears a size 14. In fact, 68 percent of American women are now considered "plus-sized," making the announcement by Crain's New York Business, that the nation's recession had caused national retailers, including some major chains, to discontinue women's plus sizes to save money, shocking to many.

Stores, including Ann Taylor and Bloomingdales, started to reduce clothing sizes and will begin carrying only sizes 0 to 10, 12 or 14 (depending on the clothing line) in store. Still others, like area Filene's Basements, while holding on temporarily to the space inside their stores, have eliminated most of the clothing in them and according to sales associates, will not get additional clothing sized 16 and above, until some time in October.

The rationale is that plus-sized fashion lines are also more expensive to produce, given the extra material needed and the need to hire plus size models. Still, as some shoppers at the Mall at Prince George's explained, the cost has always trickled down to the customers.

"The clothing may cost more to produce, but we are still talking pennies on the dollar. Anyway, you only need to look at the tags of clothes size 10 and 20 to see that the difference in cost – sometimes three or four dollars, sometimes 10 or 15 dollars, is being passed on to the plus-sized consumer," said LaTavia Brown, 27, of Hyattsville, MD.

Eboni Fisher, 19, of Bowie, MD, said that the retailers were also not factoring ethnicity in the making of clothing, which for some with larger hips, thighs, and backsides, forced them into plus-sized pieces though they were not considered plus-sized.

"A lot of women of color have small waistlines, but have 'apple bottoms' and hips. By my waist I should be in a size 10 pants, but I need a 16 for the fit to be right. I think that, in the end, the regular stores will lose out and places like Lane Bryant will reap the benefits," Fisher said.

Some chains have actually increased their lines to include larger sizes, particularly those serving youth markets. While this measure is more a function of the expanding waists of grammar school children and adolescents, stores like Forever 21, Old Navy, and Gap, offer sizes up to 20.

R.J. Miller, 56, a Greenbelt-based financial consultant, said that while it may be poor judgment on the part of the retailers, many are looking strictly at their bottom line in determining what to eliminate in hard times.

"It is clear that retailers don't respect their plus-sized customers by the fact that the departments are usually hidden in the basements or on the upper levels, next to bedding, customer service or the toilets," Miller said. "This brings the point home, though it is masked as a recession-induced measure to address an eight percent fall in sales last year, compared to a two percent decline for the 0 to 12 size sector."

Some data suggests the move to purge plus-sized clothing began before the announcement

made two weeks ago. Clothier Liz Claiborne started restructuring two years ago, by eliminating its plus-sized line Elisabeth. A year later, Liz Claiborne closed Sigrid Olsen, a popular line that had a dedicated plus-size following, and sold another line, Ellen Tracy, to Fashionology Group, which opted out of plus-size clothing completely earlier this year.

Bloomingdale’s moved their plus-size department at one of their New York stores to the third floor from the basement two years ago. The company is also offering fewer lines. Bloomingdale's no longer carries AK Anne Klein Plus in its stores but sells the collection on the Web, employees said. It now stocks only the group's standard women's and petite collections in stores. Bloomingdale’s declined to comment.

One consolation prize, is that many of these stores and lines are still available on-line through e-commerce, Miller said.

Many of the same retailers yanking departments will allow these products to be purchased through their on-line sites. So far Ann Taylor, Banana Republic and Old Navy have moved their larger sizes to e-commerce.