

Educators: Town arrests reflect heroin's tight grip

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The arrest of two Smithtown highway workers for heroin possession did not stun local educators and drug counselors who've watched the drug tighten its grip even as the community began an aggressive anti-drug effort.

"I don't think any of us can say that we have eliminated the problem by any stretch," Smithtown schools Superintendent Edward Ehmann said, noting how the district has ramped up its drug education curriculum in recent years.

Smithtown was the focus of a Newsday story last year that highlighted a town in the grip of a heroin epidemic among its teens and young adults. Educators, law enforcement, legislators and town officials, including its own drug counselors, have mobilized to combat the flow of drugs into the schools and community places.

Elaine Economopoulos, director of the town's drug and alcohol counseling center, said the town is pushing forward with employee meetings.

Highway Superintendent Glenn Jorgensen has told employees they need to get help now, because if they are caught later with drugs, they could be demoted or fired.

"I don't want to say I'm glad this happened, but at least nobody got killed with a town truck," he said of the possibility of a drug-influenced driver wreaking havoc. "It could have been worse."

As well as the two highway employees arrested on heroin possession charges, another two from the department were arrested on marijuana possession charges.

The four arrests occurred several weeks ago at the main highway yard on Route 347, according to town officials.

One highway employee Thursday described those arrested as "decent kids," adding three of the four have fathers who also work for the department.

"This is an epidemic . . . I hope they get the help they need," the employee said.