

## Smithtown cuts workers' compensation costs

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Smithtown has reduced the cost of its workers' compensation the past two years, and by \$700,000 this year alone.

The reduction is based on a couple of factors, including aggressive investigation of suspicious claims, recurring safety education and new union contract language that requires employees to wear safety equipment and gives the town disciplinary recourse against those who don't comply.

In 2003-2004, Smithtown incurred \$1.9 million in workers' compensation costs. In the last full year of 2007-2008, that cost was reduced to \$572,501.

Town Comptroller Anthony Minerva said the savings came when the town switched companies to Wright Risk Management Company in Uniondale. Representatives from the company who spoke at Tuesday's work session called their partnership with Smithtown "a model" for other municipalities to emulate.

Minerva estimated that the town's premiums under the old system and company would have been slightly more than \$2 million. This year's premium will be \$1.37 million.

Wright Risk Management said the average costs have increased in other municipalities an average of 10 percent a year.

In the town-company partnership, the company's loss management supervisor rode with highway workers to figure out why they were getting hurt picking up leaf bags, and the recommended changes - smaller leaf bags for instance - have reduced injuries there, company officials said.

There has also been a strong emphasis on uncovering fraudulent claims, and bimonthly meetings with town department heads and Councilman Edward Wehrheim and the company to discuss cases and ways to fix safety issues.

Most injuries occur in blue-collar jobs where there is physical exertion, company officials said.