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## **Bills push safety for sanitation workers**

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Parents of Ossining man killed last year behind state efforts

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The Journal News

Sanitation workers across the state would be required to wear helmets when riding garbage trucks under a law being proposed by two state lawmakers in the wake of an Ossining workplace fatality during the summer.

The legislation announced yesterday by Assemblywoman Sandra Galef, D-Ossining, and state Sen. Nicholas Spano, R-Yonkers, would also require new trucks used for municipal sanitation routes to be equipped with a rear-facing video camera to allow the driver to monitor the back of the rig while backing up.

Joining Spano and Galef at the news conference were the parents of Ossining sanitation worker **John-Paul Rodrigues**, 24, who died of a head injury after he fell off the rear of a village recycling truck.

"If helmets were mandatory last July, maybe my son would be alive today," Malita **Rodrigues** said. "Though we can't dwell on the past, at least we can learn from it." Galef credited Malita and Joe **Rodrigues** for the initiative and praised "their courage and persistence in their great sorrow to fight for the safety of all sanitation workers." Although there may be opposition to the measure in Albany - the video and audio equipment adds about \$2,000 to the cost of a sanitation truck - Spano and Galef said the expense was worthwhile.

"We're mandating worker safety, but it's an investment worth making," Spano said. Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano, who ordered the county to begin purchasing the video-equipped trucks, said the money involved was affordable.

"It's \$200 a year," he said, factoring in the lifetime of a truck. "It's negligible." Yesterday's news conference was held near the county's garbage plant at Charles Point in Peekskill. Solid-waste workers have the seventh-highest mortality rate among all industries. In addition to the Ossining accident, worker deaths have occurred in Tarrytown, Cortlandt, New Rochelle and Mamaroneck in recent years.

The county also is working on improving safety for sanitation workers through another initiative. Marco Gennarelli, highway superintendent for the town of Mamaroneck and head of an association of public-works administrators, is putting together a task force to look at workplace safety.

"We'll come up with additional training measures and safety measures to make sure sanitation workers stay safe," Gennarelli said.

The bills introduced by Galef and Spano, which will be assigned to committees soon, would allow Westchester County to adopt the safety measures if the rest of the state failed to follow suit.

That would mean that municipal governments in Westchester would have to adhere to the new regulations.

Ossining Mayor Eugene Napolitano was in attendance yesterday, but said Ossining - short of following a state or county mandate - won't adopt the new safety measures on its own. Napolitano said the village supports the concept but was being sued by the Rodrigueses for wrongful death and that the litigation would have to run its course first, citing advice from Ossining's lawyers and its insurance carrier.

Meanwhile, the Ossining public works facility will be officially renamed in honor of **John-Paul Rodrigues** at a ceremony today at the Ossining Operations Center, Route 9A, beginning at 10:30 a.m.

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