

WASTE INDUSTRY
HEALTH AND SAFETY

REFUSE COLLECTION

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GMB believes this sector deserves better guidelines on how the job can be done more safely, and this leaflet attempts to identify some of the hazards involved and look at ways of **reducing** the risk from these **hazards**.



INTRODUCTION

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PERCEPTION

The collection of refuse is often taken for granted in a modern society. People's expectations are that they put the rubbish out and within a day it's gone – with little or no thought to how it is collected. The attitude is often one of "I pay my council tax and that's just part of the service."

For those who collect rubbish however, the reality of the situation is very often different. Refuse collection is a statutory duty as it is an obvious public health hazard. It is also a very hazardous task to undertake. The following covers some of the hazards involved and how the risks of injury and ill health to refuse collectors can be reduced.

RISKS & HAZARDS

where collections are carried out can be narrow or full of parked vehicles. These can all contribute to the roadworthiness of the vehicles.

It is important therefore, that the vehicle is checked properly before leaving the depot, and perhaps more importantly that it is not used if there is anything not working properly. Of course, there will be pressure to drive vehicles with minor defects but this should be resisted. Not only is your licence at stake – someone's life may also, at stake.

EQUIPMENT

With changes in methods of collection over recent years some of the equipment which needs to be operated is often complex, and dangerous. NO ONE SHOULD operate any equipment on a vehicle without first having been given proper and thorough training on all aspects of the equipment. All vehicles and their equipment should be maintained and monitored on a regular basis.

COLLECTION METHODS

How refuse is collected will have a bearing on the type of hazards encountered. The majority will obviously involve some form of manual handling. Refuse sacks are still used in many areas and the principal difficulty with these is judging the weight of each individual sack. Guidance suggests that an average of no more than two sacks should be picked up at any one time but this is not always practical or possible.

Using "Wheelie bins", while easier on backs than the old traditional bins, may be storing up other problems for the future. The use of these



VEHICLES

Refuse vehicles come in all shapes and sizes. Due to increasing demands in terms of volumes of rubbish or larger beats to collect from, some of the vehicles take a real hammering. So much so, that in recent years some fleet managers have looked to replace the hoppers, while retaining the cabs and chassis, half-way through their expected life.

Some of the surfaces where the rubbish is tipped might be very uneven, or the streets

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bins promotes a more intensive repetitive work regime, mainly involving the arms with an emphasis on the wrists. An assessment needs to be carried out on the likelihood of Upper Limb Disorders (RSI) where these bins are used.

In some areas, particularly high density flats, "Palladins" or "Eurobins" may be the preferred method of collection. Due to their size, and often the distance they have to be moved, additional hazards such as obstacles and people can give rise to risk. These containers are also prone to

the job. However, where a hazard exists, an assessment should identify the level of risk and possibility of something actually happening, and measures then put in place to develop as safe a system of work possible.

MUSCLOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Most commonly associated with back, shoulder and arm injuries, these injuries arise out of incorrect manual handling. This can involve the

damage with their weight and the unevenness of many paths. All defects should be reported and where possible, regular maintenance programmes should be introduced.

HAZARDS

As previously mentioned there are numerous hazards associated with refuse collection. Many of these may well be familiar to those who carry out the task and may often be just seen as part of

load being too heavy or awkward, or the lack of dropped kerbs for "Palladins" or "Eurobins". Sometimes rubbish has to be taken from restricted spaces, such as cupboards, or carried up stairs which can add to the problem. Manual handling training, sometimes called kinetic lifting training, should be given before the jobs start. This should be appropriate to the task, and not set in an office environment where training on how to pick up empty boxes is given, but real on the job training is required.



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SHARPS OBJECTS & HYPODERMIC NEEDLES

One of the most obvious hazards when handling refuse in sacks is the potential for sharp objects such as broken glass, serrated edges of tin cans or even knives to protrude as the bag is being lifted or swung. A quick visual assessment should be made before the sacks are picked up. They should be carried away from legs, and on no account be placed on shoulders, and when placing in the refuse truck care should be taken of working colleagues or members of the public.

A puncture wound from a hypodermic needle carries a far greater danger. Needles often carry other people's blood which can be contaminated with a number of viruses. Clear procedures should be in place for those affected by this, including reporting medical advice, and the offer of counselling if necessary. All these injuries should be reported, no matter how minor they may seem at the time, and high risk maps should be drawn up of geographical areas where there may be a greater danger from needles.

VIOLENCE

In modern society members of the public are often less tolerant of lorries blocking the roads, or miscellaneous refuse being left, than in the past. In some situations violent behaviour can manifest itself in a number of ways – from verbal abuse to spitting, up to physical violence. All incidents should be reported. The employer should also make it clear that any perpetration of physical assaults will be prosecuted.

PETS

Most family pets are reasonably harmless. However, some animals, particularly dogs, are very territorial, especially when someone else enters their property. In some urban areas packs of dogs also roam, and dogs can also be used in

violent personal attacks. Again, recording of these incidents, and a refusal to carry out the task until safety measures have been introduced should reduce future risk.

REVERSING VEHICLES

Even with modern technology, such as cab installed CCTV, there are often blind spots on refuse vehicles. Children in particular are fascinated by refuse trucks, and the elderly may not hear any warning noises. For everyone's



safety a "banksman" should ensure safe reversing at all times. Appropriate training on correct signalling will be required to undertake this properly.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Working on busy roads, carrying heavy loads and practically all weather conditions require the use of PPE. A minimum requirement would be “toetector” footwear, high visibility clothing, gloves and appropriate weather gear (for rain, heat, cold etc). In addition ballistic or reinforced trousers to minimise against puncture wounds from sharp objects may be required. Any PPE should be appropriate to the task, not just the cheapest, and GMB safety representatives should be consulted, and if possible try out any PPE before general issue.

TRAFFIC

Traffic volumes do not get any lighter. Routes should be planned so busy streets are collected at off peak times. Where this is not possible, on no account should refuse be manoeuvred across traffic flow. Instead, each side of the road should be collected separately. Flashing lights and even warning signs should be clearly visible on the vehicle, and collectors need to be careful when stepping out from behind the vehicle, even on the quietest streets.

TIME PRESSURE/TASK AND FINISH

Due to the nature of the work many collections still operate a “Task and Finish” system. This is usually because it benefits all sides. However, there is often a tendency to cut corners in an attempt to cut the time. This can lead to hazardous situations because correct methods have not been followed. In addition, if extra work is added to the round this can then lead to pressure and stress to ensure that this work gets completed.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

The key to controlling exposure to hazards at work is risk assessment. The purpose of a risk assessment is to identify the hazards involved and look to eliminate, where possible, or reduce the risk to as low a level as possible. Operatives and safety representatives should be involved in this process as they will be the ones with detailed knowledge of the job and what actually happens, while the task is being carried out. All findings should be recorded and reviewed, and monitored over time to ensure that best practice is being followed.

CONCLUSION

In a job dealing with the public and their throwaway society it is difficult to deal with every potential hazardous situation. For example members of the public may put garden chemicals, paint or asbestos sheets in bins. You may be “asked” to move a vehicle or some rubbish with the encouragement of a weapon. Or then again there is just the everyday stress of driving in modern traffic.

GMB believes that no one should be unnecessarily injured or suffer ill health at work. Proper systems of work should be put into place with GMB safety representatives consulted before any new machinery, PPE or work methods are introduced.

Adequate training should be given on all aspects of the job, and the employer should be prepared to support the workforce where they have been subjected to violence. Refuse collection can be a hazardous occupation but, with the help of GMB, it doesn't have to be unnecessarily dangerous.

H&S CHECKLIST

GMB has produced a checklist against which you can match your employer's approach to health and safety. If you cannot tick items positively, there will be a need to raise the issue with your employer and ensure that it is addressed as soon as possible. The following may be relevant to your situation.

This list is not exhaustive and there may be particular issues which need to be raised at a local level. If management fail to treat the issue of health and safety seriously contact your GMB safety representative, organiser or regional health and safety officer.



**REMEMBER
YOU'RE SAFER IN GMB**

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Have risk assessments been carried out on all aspects of the job? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are the vehicles checked before leaving the depot? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is there a procedure in place for recording needlestick injuries? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are all violent incidents recorded? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are violent perpetrators prosecuted by your employer? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is there an independent counselling service offered to employees? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is there adequate PPE for the job? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do GMB safety representatives get consulted before any changes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you been given manual handling training? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are rounds prepared and undertaken with traffic in mind? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |