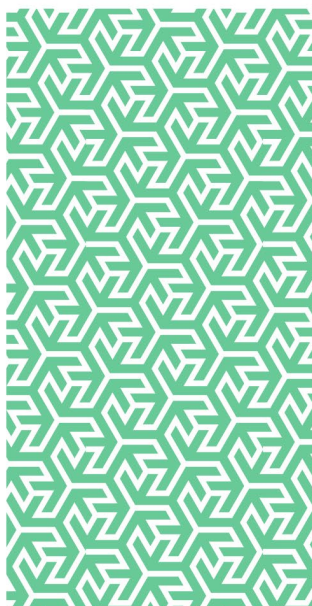



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Risk control

Waste Collection and Culture Risk Management Guidance



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Waste Collection and Culture Risk Management Guidance

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Introduction

Waste collection services are one of the most hazardous parts of the waste industry. Work is undertaken on public roads with live traffic and in constantly changing conditions. Workers must deal with a variety of waste materials while encountering risks that are not within their employer's direct control. Physical management and supervision are more difficult than at fixed workplaces.

Kerbside collections of domestic waste also present a significant risk to local authorities and members of the public. For local authorities where the service is contracted out, due diligence in the selection of the service provider and subsequent contract management is part of the effective risk transfer process.

Showing moral leadership and ensuring legal compliance will benefit the reputation of a local authority, whilst reducing financial loss from costly accidents. These losses can include fines and claims for compensation.

This guide is intended to assist local authorities in managing these risks by addressing cultural change as part of a broader change management process.

1. Background

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) statistics for 2023¹ show us that there were 6 fatal injuries to workers in the waste industry in Great Britain in 2022/23. This is in comparison with the annual average of 5 fatalities over the five-year period 2018/19-2022/23.

In addition, 4,000 workers sustained non-fatal injuries at work averaged over the seven-year period 2016/17-2022/23, with 'slips, trips and falls on the same level' accounting for 32% of these injuries, and 'injured while handling, lifting, and carrying' the cause of 25%.

The upturn in fatal injuries and significant number of non-fatal injury events should remind organisations involved in waste collection and recycling that they must continue their efforts to develop and enhance positive safety cultures within their waste collection services.

Although reducing in popularity, some of the challenges in waste collection have been compounded by a traditional 'task and finish' working culture which rewarded operatives who finished their collection rounds quickly with an early conclusion to their working day. It is easy to appreciate that in these circumstances, health and safety procedures may be viewed as a potential barrier to acquiring the expected reward.

Collection methods may be affected by changes to working trends such as target-related waste separation, which conflicts with pressure for local authorities to reduce frequency of collections as part of cost saving programmes.

Local authorities and larger commercial waste companies are well equipped to provide health and safety leadership as principal procurers (and suppliers) of waste and recycling services. Incorporating health and safety into contract tenders can influence standards if clear expectations are set and fulfilment is monitored.

2. Legislation and Enforcement

It is impossible to legislate for "culture." However, under the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974², local authorities owe a duty of care to the workers who participate in waste collection and recycling services, and to anyone else who could be affected by their operations.

Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide legislation may be applied to a local authority in the event of a fatal accident, where standards are deemed to have fallen well below that which would have been expected.

3. Prosecution

The following recent examples are taken from the HSE's Prosecution and enforcement database³.

- A London Borough Council was served with an Improvement Notice for not having a suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place regarding the collection routes.
- A Scottish City Council was fined £20,000 following the death of a pensioner after he was struck by a reversing waste vehicle. Neither the agency driver nor a local authority employee in the vehicle had undergone reversing assistant training.
- Veolia ES Sheffield Limited (Veolia) and John Fowler and Son (Blacksmiths and Welders) Limited (JFS) were fined a total of £815,000 after a worker and father-to-be was crushed to death by a waste collection vehicle.

- A waste management and plant hire company pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £300,000 and ordered to pay costs of £50,737, after an employee was crushed between the two vehicles and died of catastrophic head injuries. The HSE found there were no rules or control of reversing manoeuvres, and the lighting at the site was poor and below the required standard.

Whilst none of the above prosecutions cited “culture” within their cases, we believe it is likely that a failure or absence of a good safety culture contributed to the accidents, and gave rise to prosecutions and incurred costs.

Policies

Local authorities should review their range of safety policies and ensure that they cover the activities and specific requirements of the waste collection service, whether in-house or contracted out.

Risk Assessment

The risks presented by waste collection services can be mitigated through careful planning and the implementation of robust risk management practices. The HSE provides resources on topics such as manual handling, noise and vibration, control of substances hazardous to health, and driving at work⁴.

Detailed risk assessments must be completed, recorded, acted upon, communicated, and regularly reviewed. The risk assessments should be suitable and sufficient, cover all aspects of the waste collection activity including the route, specification of equipment, use of equipment, tasks performed by each member of the crew, weather conditions, and the methods of entering or exiting the vehicle. Each operational risk should be assessed and controlled as far as is reasonably practicable. Risk assessments should involve consultation with the relevant workforce.

4. Leadership

Strong and visible leadership by management, with effective workforce engagement, promotes a positive health and safety culture⁵. Directors and senior managers of waste collection services should consider the questions and information on the Leadership page of the HSE’s website⁶.

5. Commissioning Waste Services

Many local authorities choose to contract out their waste collection service to a third-party provider. Where such contractual transfers occur, the local authority remains subject to the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Risk transfer is only effective if reasonable steps are taken to ensure the contractor is competent and acts in accordance with the terms of the contract and legal requirements. The reputation of a local authority cannot be transferred to a contractor.

6. Checking Compliance

Where the service is contracted out, periodic checks and monitoring should ensure that the third-party contractor is continuing to perform to the contractual terms and adhering to legal requirements. There are many ways of facilitating this, from informal meetings, performance reviews, reviews of incidents, spot checks, and formal audits. Some historical research conducted by HSE suggested that up to 25% of all contract selection processes had failed to adequately consider health and safety⁷.

7. Culture

The culture of an organisation may be described as ‘the mix of shared values, attitudes and patterns of behaviour that give the organisation its particular character.’ Whereas the safety culture of an organisation could be described as ‘the ideas and beliefs that all members of the organisation share about risk, accidents and ill health.’

The safety culture of an organisation can have far reaching consequences as has been shown in historical accidents such as Ladbroke Grove, Piper Alpha and Buncefield. In the field of safety, culture is sometimes described as “the way things are done around here.”

There are a number of common characteristics that identify the presence of a good safety culture within an organisation. Cultural factors include:

- Management and leadership
- Just culture
- Information flow
- Risk awareness
- Learning culture
- Staff involvement

These factors encompass the values, beliefs and attitudes that are held within the organisation and guide the way that people behave whilst undertaking their work. It influences the priorities that managers have, the decisions they make, and the actions that their employees take.

8. Demonstrating Safety Culture

Safety culture starts with leadership at the highest level. Good senior managers make a visible commitment to health and safety by making regular visits to sites and establish good soft skills (e.g. communication skills) to engage meaningfully with the workforce.

All managers within an organisation demonstrating a strong health and safety culture will maintain an understanding of the form and nature of their culture and risk exposures in their organisation. A common misinterpretation at senior management level is an expectation that supervisors will change culture by diktat; however, where this change is not felt to be supported at a higher level, then cultural change will be, at best, slow.

It is also common for hierarchical structures to demonstrate a perceived intangible element of interference at some level. This acts as an impediment to change. This may be because of conflicts between the goals of senior management and for example, trades unions.

9. Discipline

Managers who express an understanding of safety culture will not tolerate violations of procedures. They actively try to improve systems to discourage violations (e.g. plan work so that short cuts are not necessary to do the work in time).

The following three statements are examples of where a safety culture is absent:

Staff regularly express or demonstrate anxiety of retribution related to reporting or suffering accidents

It is perceived that managers are reluctant to initiate disciplinary action for safety breaches (such as where it involves a permanent contract employee with strong union support)

There is a difference between agency staff, with insecure posts, and permanent staff, who have less anxiety about losing their job

10. Competence

The HSE suggests a definition of competency as “someone who has the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to manage health and safety”⁸. A HSE research project commissioned an identification of the competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours) required for roadside waste and recycling collection supervisors and team leaders. It asked how current training could ensure these competencies are developed and maintained⁹.

Industry Standards

To achieve suitable practice in procedures and systems, many organisations maintain membership of industry bodies such as the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum¹⁰. By sharing information and experiences, members develop in competency, capability, and knowledge.

Personal Development

It is common for vacancies to be filled by promoting up through the ranks, but promoted staff are then not trained how to manage and lead staff.

It is expected that there is an annual personal development review for all supervisors. For those who attend these reviews, the outcomes will be dependent on their existing skills and competencies. Personal objectives are discussed, concerns are explored, and training offered. Discussions should cover the ‘soft skills’ associated with developing positive working relationships with others.

Training

Because of the high profile of the waste industry, formal systems of training for all aspects of waste collection work are commonplace. Supervisors may be offered management training (such as Institute of Leadership and Management level 3 / 4¹¹), although not all accept the opportunity, and the courses may not to be mandatory. Many organisations are now opting for e-learning supervisor training and CPD-logging systems, with in-built escalation processes in decision making and leadership.

11. Communications

The expectations and instructions of senior and operational managers must be communicated effectively to their teams. This may include methods statements and route maps with hazards identified. This information should be in written form, with language and literacy capabilities considered. Other methods such as team briefings and one-to-one meetings may also be required. Records must be kept.

Managers should understand the roles that their staff undertake. Employees may know whether something is practical or if corners are being cut. Ensuring that there is an effective two-way communication process in place, ensuring confidentiality as necessary, will increase that understanding.

12. Supervision

Engaged managers and supervisors will discuss safety matters with frontline personnel and will stop waste collection or processes for safety reasons, regardless of cost. They will spend time and money on safety (e.g. to provide protective equipment and safety training) and naturally lead by example. They will deliver and attend safety workshops and demonstrate concern for wider issues such as workforce stress and general health and wellbeing.

Supervisors should be encouraged to have “safety conversations” with their staff – both positive and negative, and to formally record these events.

These conversations contribute to the overall pro-active creation of a good safety culture within the organisation.

13. Proactive Safety Regimes

As an employer, a local authority must ensure that waste collections are conducted safely. This includes ensuring that policies and procedures are being followed and are achieving the expected reductions in risk exposure. There are a number of methods that can be used to ensure compliance, of which the most common are outlined below. It is anticipated that local authorities will employ all these methods and will keep records that can demonstrate the systems are in place.

Reactive Investigations - Detailed investigations should be conducted into adverse incidents and near misses to establish if the prescribed controls were in place at the time of the incident. Investigations should be conducted as soon as possible after an incident takes place, and thorough records should be kept. Claimants usually have up to 3 years to make a personal injury claim, and so if adequate information is not gathered at the time of the incident, then the management of a subsequent claim may be seriously impeded due to a lack of paperwork.

Proactive Spot Checks - Managers should check the work of those that they supervise to ensure that prescribed standards are being met on a regular basis. These checks should be recorded. Over the course of a year, managers and senior managers should conduct spot checks on operational activities. These spot checks are intended to check compliance with risk assessments, method statements and any relevant policies and procedures.

Proactive Record Checks - Managers should regularly check the records that their team members are expected to keep, ensuring that they are up to date and accurate.

Proactive Self-check - On an annual basis, senior managers should assess their own systems. This should assess compliance with company policies, and overall effectiveness of the systems.

Proactive External Audit - Using the services of an independent and competent person or organisation, an audit of the management systems should be conducted at regular intervals. Depending on the results, the level of risk exposure and the level of assurance required by senior managers, the local authority can stipulate the frequency of audits.

Back to Basics - Senior managers must check the effectiveness of systems to establish 'direct' experience with operational activities. For example, this may mean a director or senior manager spending time with the waste collection service in an operational context.

Data Reviews – Local authorities should regularly review the effectiveness of their systems, including using reactive data such as incident and claims statistics, and pro-active data such as risk-assessment reviews, training schedules, and action plans.

The following pages offer suggestions for what to look for when considering whether a good safety culture exists in your organisation.

Example of good safety culture demonstrated by managers:

Type of Leadership	Demonstrated by	Effectiveness
Senior management	Some senior managers are regularly seen on site and take part in joint inspections or other activities.	✓
Competency framework for managers	Take responsibility and are accountable for the delivery of objectives and plans.	✓
Supervisory duties	Supervisors are expected to attend three site observations / inspections per-day where they will record many safety related matters including vehicle safety and adherence to safe systems. Recording of visits are made on the Supervisor's Monitoring Log.	✓
Monitoring	Statistics are produced internally and discussed regularly at team meetings, union meetings etc.	✓
Training by managers	The delivery of messages using toolbox talks is known to improve the system of raising awareness of safety.	✓
Employee involvement	Accident and incident statistics provided to crews with the aim is to focus drivers on identified trends and clusters of data and make efforts to ensure everyone is performing in a consistent manner.	✓

Example of poor safety culture demonstrated by managers:

Type of Leadership	Demonstrated by	Effectiveness
Inconsistency	Continually introducing new initiatives, changes in policy, re-organisation as a solution to all problems.	✗
Favouritism	Personnel habitually 'leapfrogging' line managers and taking matters to higher management. This is usually done because of relationship issues.	✗
H&S Committee imbalance	Committees heavily attended by the workforce (or union representatives) who, in some cases, will disrupt the meeting process. Equally, weak line manager participation.	✗
Form filling	Paper-based systems result in supervisors being office bound for a significant part of their shift. Daily safety sheets take considerable time to complete and are regarded as pointless.	✗
Failure of feedback	Managers fail to feedback on incident reports and investigations, and complaints.	✗

Example of good safety culture demonstrated by workforce:

Type of Engagement	Demonstrated by	Effectiveness
Competence	Suitably qualified in their work, to appropriate health and safety standards.	✓
Workforce involvement	Workforce participation and ownership of safety problems and solutions.	✓
Responsibility	Take responsibility for theirs and others actions - such as reminding colleagues to wear the correct PPE when it is visibly absent.	✓
Communication	Take part in and actively promote the safety "message."	✓
Continuous development	Acknowledge and actively participate in the provision of continuous personal development.	✓

Example of poor safety culture demonstrated by workforce:

Type of Behaviour	Demonstrated by	Effectiveness
Task and finish	Only interested in completing the job in the shortest possible time.	X
Avoiding participation	Not attending safety training courses, not volunteering for safety committee work etc.	X
Ignoring safety rules	Taking short cuts in process.	X
Failure to wear correct PPE	Habitually failing to comply with basic safety rules. Not wearing personal protective equipment.	X
Relationships	Aggressive or confrontational when challenged over safety performance or compliance.	X

References

- Ref 1 www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/waste-recycling.pdf
- Ref 2 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/contents
- Ref 3 www.hse.gov.uk/enforce/convictions.htm
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- Ref 11 <https://www.i-l-m.com/Learning-and-Development/management/management-and-leadership-generic/8600-level-3-leadership-and-management>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

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