



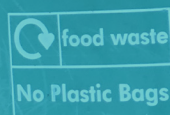
GMB **UNION** **GUIDE**

Waste and recycling

Many GMB members work in the waste and recycling industry, in the public sector or private organisations, right across the UK. Collection methods have changed over the years, and proper training isn't always given.

Training will often be done on the job, just observing a couple of the more experienced operatives, who will probably not be qualified to train and may well pass on some bad health and safety practices.

The aim of this GMB guidance booklet is to give you the knowledge to help you to do the job more safely and to help keep yourself and your colleagues safe. This leaflet identifies some of the hazards involved and looks at ways of reducing the risk to you from those hazards. If you want to make a real difference and your workplace safer then why not become a GMB Safety Representative by speaking to your GMB Branch Secretary or Officer.



The collection of waste, however it is disposed of or treated, is often taken for granted. The public's expectations are that they put the waste out and within a day it's gone—with little or no thought to how it is collected or the risks involved. The attitude is often one of "I pay my council tax so my rubbish should be collected." For those who collect waste however, the reality of the situation is often very different.

Waste collection is a statutory duty as uncollected rubbish is an obvious public health hazard. Irrespective of whether the waste is general waste or for recycling, the collection can also be a very hazardous task to undertake. The following covers some of the hazards involved and how the risks of injury and ill health to waste collectors can be reduced.



EVERYDAY HAZARDS

In a job dealing with the public, it is difficult to deal with every potential hazardous situation. For example, members of the public may put garden chemicals, paint or asbestos cement sheets in bins; you could be “asked” to move a vehicle or some rubbish with violence or even with the encouragement of a weapon; then there is the everyday stress of driving in modern traffic.

No one should be unnecessarily injured or suffer ill health at work. Proper systems of work should be put into place with GMB Safety Reps consulted before any new machinery, PPE or work methods are introduced. GMB Safety Reps should be fully consulted on all safety and welfare issues, including during contract preparation.

Everyone should get adequate training on all aspects of the job and the employer should be prepared to support the workforce where they have been subjected to violent attacks. Waste collection can be a hazardous occupation but, with the help of your GMB Safety Rep, GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Officer, it can be as safe as possible.



PROCUREMENT OF WASTE SERVICES

Good health and safety begins before any round leaves the depot, this applies to the standards set down before the service has been contracted out. The client officer from the local authority, irrespective if the contract is to be carried out by the council or a preferred contractor, has a duty to ensure that certain minimum standards are met.

These would include areas such as competence, training, adequate vehicles—maintained to the correct standard, safe systems of work, as safe a working environment as possible and communication methods. GMB encourages Safety Reps to get involved in the procurement preparation.

COLLECTION METHODS

How waste is collected, either for disposal or for recycling, will have a bearing on the type of hazards you come across. 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. The same principles apply where sacks are used for compostable material.

Using “wheelie bins”, while easier on backs and upper limbs than the old traditional bins, may be storing up other problems for the future. The use of these 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, “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 damage with their weight and the unevenness of many paths. All defects should be reported and where possible, regular maintenance programmes should be introduced.

The growth in recycling has also resulted in different manual handling arrangements, with boxes often being lifted from the kerbside, containing paper, glass, tins or plastic. Again it is often difficult to gauge the weight, particularly if the paper gets wet. The repetitive lifting of boxes could also cause injury.

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

RISK ASSESSMENTS

The key to controlling exposure to danger at work is risk assessments. A risk assessment should identify the hazards involved and look to reduce their impact to the lowest level possible. Hazards include traffic, manual handling, dealing with the public and slips & trips.

Due to a lack of training and confidence some managers misunderstand the risk assessment process. The purpose of a risk assessment is not to eliminate all risk, in a job such as waste collection this would make it impossible to carry out. Its purpose is to reduce the risk to a level where measures, including PPE, route planning, clear instructions and training make the job safer.



There will still be exposure to hazards but these should be minimised if the assessments are done properly. The responsibility for risk assessments lies with management. However, it is also clear from the HSE that GMB Safety Reps should be involved in risk assessments as they will bring practical knowledge and experience from the job to the process and can help develop preventive and protective measures which will benefit the workforce.

The competent person from management does not necessarily need a qualification but should understand that the risk assessment is a “living” document that needs reviewing on a regular basis or when things change, for example the introduction of new vehicles or altered collection rounds.

VEHICLES

One of the most common causes of fatal incidents and major injuries at work are moving vehicles. According to HSE gathered statistics, there are on average 550 incidents reported involving moving vehicle in the waste and recycling sector every year and around 4 of these incidents resulting in people being killed.

Also, estimates suggest that up to one-third of all road traffic accidents involve someone who is at work at the time. The following things are important to help keep you safe, if these are not done in your workplace, speak to your GMB Safety Rep and Supervisor as a matter of urgency.

- Vehicles need to have safety checks before being taken out for each shift, these will normally be carried out by a driver who has been trained to carry them out.
- All staff must be provided with high visibility jackets.
- No one should operate vehicles unless they are authorised and trained to do so.

- There should be procedures in place to ensure safe reversing, loading and tipping, they should be known and followed by all crews.

As well as waste collection vehicles, other vehicles on the road are also a major hazard. Routes should be planned so the busiest streets are collected at off peak times. Where this is not possible, on no account should waste be manoeuvred across traffic flow. 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.

The public can sometimes take dangerous routes, such as mounting the pavement, to get around a refuse vehicle so this is also something to be aware of.



BACK, SHOULDER AND ARM INJURIES

Back, shoulder and arm injuries caused by poor manual handling are very common in the waste and recycling industry. The load might be too heavy or awkward; or the lack of dropped kerbs for wheelie bins or “Eurobins” might lead to excessive muscle strain.

Waste may have to be collected from restricted spaces, such as cupboards, or carried up or down stairs which can add to the problem. Manual handling training, must be given before the tasks starts, preferably at the induction stage. The training should be specific to the job, and should be carried out in the work environment, not in the office.

SHARP 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 protruding as the bag is being lifted or swung. Make a quick visual check before picking up any sacks.

They should be carried away from your legs, and on no account be placed on your shoulders. When you put the sack in the refuse truck, take care of working colleagues or members of the public. A puncture wound from a hypodermic needle can carry a far greater danger.

Needles often carry other people’s blood which can be contaminated with a number of viruses. Your employer must have a plan for caring for anyone stabbed with a hypodermic needle.

This must include reporting, medical advice and the offer of counselling if necessary. All these injuries must 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 is known to be a greater danger from needles.

VIOLENCE

Members of the public and householders are often less tolerant of lorries blocking the roads or miscellaneous refuse being left and GMB members have been on the receiving end of verbal and physical attacks.

These take many forms from verbal abuse or spitting, up to physical violence. Report all attacks to your manager and GMB Safety Rep. Your employer should have a policy of prosecuting anyone who physically attacks its staff.

NOISE

It can be very noisy working alongside a collection lorry although if it is properly maintained this may not be a problem. What has changed in recent years is the vast increase in glass collection and the increase in noise exposure. This may be a problem where glass is collected in boxes or bins. It will certainly be a problem where glass is collected in bulk. Usually it is a better approach to design an engineering feature to minimise the noise impact.

The use of a physical barrier or absorbent mesh could be used in these circumstances. However this can be both expensive and difficult to install into existing vehicles which will mean that for hearing protection ear defenders will have to be issued.

These should be suitable for the task and allow background noise, such as traffic or people to be detected, but cut out the peak noise when glass enters the vehicle. GMB Safety Reps should be consulted over the type of PPE issued and their requirement can be established by conducting a decibel reading during work near the vehicle.

TASK AND FINISH / JOB AND KNOCK

Due to the nature of the work many waste collections still operate a “Task & Finish” system. This is usually because it benefits the employers, workers and the public as it ensures that the job is completed within the allocated time. Within this system there may be a temptation to cut corners in an attempt to cut down the time to do any job.

This can put workers in danger if the correct methods are not followed. Adequate supervision, and training should ensure that the task is carried out efficiently and safely.

This system can also be beneficial to the vehicle as there may be more time allocated for maintenance and servicing.

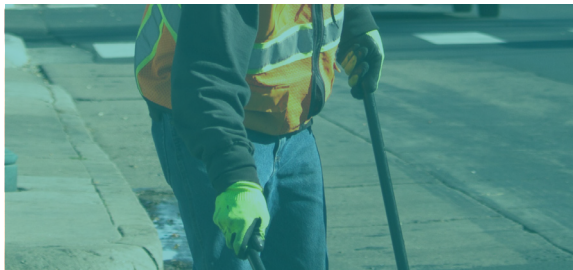
DOGS

Most pet dogs are reasonably harmless, however some dogs can be very territorial, especially when someone enters their property. In some urban areas packs of dogs can roam and dogs can be used in violent personal attacks. Again all incidents must be recorded and a refusal to carry out the task until adequate safety measures are in place will reduce future risk.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT(PPE)

Working on busy roads, carrying heavy loads in all weather conditions require the use of PPE. A minimum requirement for any collector would be steel toe cap 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. GMB Safety Reps should be consulted, and if possible try out any PPE before general issue.



STRESS

Stress can occur in any occupation and is caused by exposure to unnecessary pressure, or a lack of control over a task. This could be down to something like road works causing delays to collections, which then get worse when a crew are still having to work during rush hour, when normally the collection would have been completed much earlier.

Also extra work can be added to collection rounds, which might make the round too difficult to complete safely, leading to uncollected materials and increased pressure from managers to complete the task. Add in verbal abuse, physical threats and violence from the public and it is easy to see how stressful situations occur.

Management have a clear responsibility to protect their employees from as much risk as possible. This includes stress and as a minimum they should be using the HSE Stress Management Standards. These cover things such as workload, work patterns and the work environment and how organisational change is managed, consulted on and communicated within any organisation. These issues can be dealt with by risk assessments, as long as they are carried out by competent persons.

WHAT IS YOUR EMPLOYER'S RECORD?

GMB has produced a checklist against which you can match your employer's record on health and safety. If you cannot tick 'yes' you should raise the issue with your employer and get it addressed immediately.

The list does not include everything and there may be local issues which take priority. If management fail to treat the issue of health & safety seriously contact your GMB Safety Representative, GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Regional H&S Officer.

GMB HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE CHECKLIST:



	Yes	No
Has your employer carried out a risk assessment on all aspects of the job?	[]	[]
Are all vehicles checked before leaving the depot?	[]	[]
Is there a procedure in place for recording needlestick injuries?	[]	[]
Are all violent incidents recorded?	[]	[]
Are violent attackers prosecuted by your employer?	[]	[]
Is an independent counselling service offered to employees?	[]	[]
Is the Personal Protective Equipment supplied adequate for the job?	[]	[]
Are GMB Safety Reps consulted about any change, including during procurement?	[]	[]
Have staff had manual handling training?	[]	[]
Are collection rounds prepared and undertaken with traffic in mind?	[]	[]

NOTES

NOTES

YOU'RE SAFER AND HEALTHIER IN THE GMB

GMB is proud of its focus on workplace health and safety. Will Thorne founded GMB in 1889 in part because of the terrible working environment he experienced, and we will always fight to improve conditions and provide protection for GMB members.

It's been an established fact for more than 25 years that trade unions make the workplace safer. Time after time, research has shown that the presence of trade union Safety Representatives identify hazards and resolve issues before they can cause harm, and reduce exposures to substances that may damage health.

To back up our Representatives the GMB has a network of health and safety specialists in our Regions. The GMB also has a National Health and Safety Department that is widely acknowledged to offer amongst the best health and safety service of any trade union.

It has been proved many times that workplaces with active Safety Representatives have half as many major and serious injuries as workplaces without them – in other words you're safer and healthier in the GMB.



WHEN INCIDENTS OCCUR AT WORK - UNIONLINE

Report all accidents, incidents and attacks to your employer and get it recorded in the accident book.

Make sure you also tell your GMB Safety Rep and GMB Workplace Organiser, they will make sure that your employer acts to stop anyone else being hurt in the same way.

ROLE OF GMB SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

GMB Safety Reps have rights on health, safety and welfare issues over and above their fellow workers. They have the right:

- To **INVESTIGATE** potential hazards and causes of accidents at the workplace.
- To **INVESTIGATE** employee complaints concerning health, safety and welfare at work.
- To **MAKE REPRESENTATIONS** to the employer on any health and safety matter in the workplace.
- To **INSPECT** the workplace on a quarterly basis.
- To **INSPECT** the workplace after a reportable accident, dangerous occurrence or reportable disease.
- To **VIEW** documents relating to health and safety in the workplace.
- To **REPRESENT** employees in consultation with HSE inspectors and to receive information from them.
- To **ATTEND** safety committee meeting.
- To **TIME OFF** for **HEALTH & SAFETY** training.
- To **PAID TIME OFF** to carry out all of the above functions.

You could also contact UnionLine on **0300 333 0303** to trigger the process to make a claim against your employer to get compensation. As a GMB member you are covered against the cost of lawyers and court cases or tribunals that may be necessary to get justice for you.

