Refuse and Recycle Workers Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Refuse and recycle workers pick up the garbage for disposal, green waste for composting, and "blue stream" waste for recycle and reuse. While the industry has more automated equipment in use than ever before.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

DANGERS FACE REFUSE AND RECYCLE WORKERS

Material Recovery Facilities. Workers are confronted by many hazards in sorting and processing facilities, such as material recovery facilities (MRFs), on a daily basis. To keep their waste and recycling employees safe and prevent costly accidents and workplace tragedies, recycling facility operators should understand the common risks associated with handling unpredictable waste streams.

Vehicle Safety. Vehicle safety is the single most important part of your job. Get driver safety and defensive driving training to protect yourself on the road. Refuse and recycle workers are listed in the top ten most hazardous occupations because they are often struck by vehicles impatient to pass a slow-moving waste truck or because they fall underneath their own trucks. The safest way to ride in a waste truck is to be seat belted into the cab.

Hoping on Protocol of Refuse Worker

If you must ride on a waste truck, stand only on the dedicated riding platforms and grasp the handholds firmly. Do not lean out from the vehicle. Stay on the truck until it comes to a complete halt. Do not ride the vehicle if it is backing, exceeds ten miles per hour, or travels more than 1,000 feet. Never ride on a truck

loading sill or in its hoppers. Ideally, waste trucks with a foot crew should have backup beepers, plenty of mirrors, and technology such as cameras, sensors, or two-way radios to promote communication and visibility between the driver and the workers on foot.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

RECYCLING WORKERS SAFETY AND HEALTH DANGERS

1. Exposure To Harmful Chemical And Biological Substances. Workers must contend with consumer ignorance and misconceptions about the recycling process and what is actually recyclable. Exposure risks are:

- Used hypodermic needles.
- Sharp objects, such as broken glass, nails, sharp metal, and wood shards.
- Industrial and household chemicals, including motor oil, mercury containing thermometers, solvents, and batteries.
- Dead and rotting animals, such as squirrels, cats, and dogs that climbed into containers looking for food and got stuck.
- Biohazards, such as rotting food waste, used diapers, animal feces, and disease-causing pathogens.

2. Moving Vehicles and Improperly Secured Material Bales. Industrial vehicles, such as forklifts, and trucks, are needed to transport waste and recyclables, putting workers at risk of being struck or run over. Heavy material bales are also capable of severely injuring or crushing workers if they are improperly stored and secured.

3. Moving Machinery: Compactors, Conveyor Belts, And Sorting Machinery. Recycling equipment requires cleaning, servicing, adjustments, or some other sort of general maintenance to maintain efficient processing and sorting activities. If proper lockout-tagout procedures aren’t implemented when workers must service or unjam equipment, employees face amputations or fatal crushing injuries. Lock/tag procedures are a safety measure used to ensure machines are properly shut off and cannot restart before servicing

is complete.

4. Respiratory Hazards: Dust and Airborne Contaminants. Waste and recyclable materials generate a lot of dust that can have serious health consequences. This dust can contain micro-particles of plastics, glass, biohazards, toxic substances such as asbestos or silica, and other respiratory irritants. Even animal feces, rotting food, and other organic waste can become airborne in the form of “bioaerosols”. Masks and proper ventilation can reduce the health risks associated with airborne toxins.

5. Awkward Positions and Repetitive Motion Injuries. Waste and recyclables workers must often twist, reach, jump, and stoop to sort materials on fast-paced conveyor belts with fixed widths and heights. Because sorters often stand bent forward for hours at a time using recurrent motions, they can suffer from repetitive stress injuries of the back, shoulder, knees, hands, and fingers.

PREVENTION SAFETY MEASURES FOR REFUSE AND RECYCLE WORKERS

Wear PPE

Wear the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for your job site and tasks. Highly visible clothing makes you more noticeable to coworkers and other drivers, so you are less likely to be struck by a vehicle. Safety footwear with wide cleats and a slip-resistant sole prevents you from falling off of riding platforms and slipping underneath a moving vehicle. Sturdy work gloves protect your hands from the materials you handle.

Equipment Training

- Get the training you need to operate waste and recycle vehicles and equipment, which often use hydraulic mechanisms to crush and compress materials.

Chemical Safety Training

- Take chemical safety training to understand the hazards of the materials you may find in your pickups. Wastes such as explosives, chemicals, aerosol cans, and compressed gas

tanks can be hazardous when they are disturbed, mixed, punctured, or compressed. If you suspect a waste is hazardous, do not pick it up or disturb it.

Sharps

- Sharps waste includes hypodermic needles, broken glass, and metal shards. Report medical waste that has improperly entered the waste stream and ensure that it gets correct pickup and handling. Encourage your service users to double bag or containerize broken glass and sharp metal pieces to reduce your exposure to them.

Ergonomics

- Protect your back and muscles at work. Lift with your legs and not your back. Maintain neutral postures by keeping your back straight, your head forward, and your arms and legs close to your body. Avoid awkward postures and know your lifting limits. Take a short rest break every 20-to-30 minute and rotate tasks throughout the day to avoid repetition and overuse injuries.

FINAL WORD

The waste industry is one of the most hazardous industries that exist. Using safe working practices, is critical to reduce the likelihood of accidents taking place. It is vital to remain aware of your surroundings and never take safety short cuts in this industry.