Refuse and Recycle Workers Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Workers involved in waste collection may be at risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) from workplace activities which force them to work beyond their physical capacities (i.e., lifting an item that is too heavy, or lifting too often, or working in awkward body postures).
2. Workers in the recycling industry are vulnerable to lead exposure as the recycled material, especially electronics or scrap metal may contain lead. As these recyclables are being crushed, burned, or cut, workers could be exposed to airborne lead.
3. There are a huge range of hazards in the waste management and recycling industries. Many of these can be minimized with proper awareness and training. They Include:

- **Workplace transport** – Risks include reversing accidents, poor visibility, site traffic, loading and unloading vehicles, and working at a height.
- **Slips trips and falls** – With contaminated, slippery floors are real risk, and workers need to be aware of the environment they are working in and wear the appropriate footwear.
- **Working at a height,** proper access equipment needs to be used to prevent falls from occurring.
- **Manual handling** – Workers handle heavy objects incorrectly on a regular basis injuries and strains can occur.
- **Harmful materials** – Workers are exposed to dangerous materials and injuries can occur through skin contact, ingestion, and even via inhalation through the lungs.

STATS

- According to B.L.S. refuse and recyclable materials collection is the sixth most dangerous job in this country. Of the 52 waste worker fatalities recorded in 2020, the (SWANA) reported that 36 (69%) were the result of transportation incidents.
- For every 100,000 full-time collection workers, there were 33.1 fatal work injuries, down from 35.2 in 2019. Overall, there were 31 fatalities in the related ”solid waste collection˝ category for 2020, with 16 of those resulting from transportation incidents. This was down from 2019, when there were 43 fatalities, 26 of which were due to transportation incidents.
- Though collection worker fatalities declined this year, deaths at MRFs and landfills increased. There were four MRF deaths in 2020, compared to three in 2019. BLS recorded six fatalities at solid waste landfills and none in 2019.
- The Solid Waste Association of North America’s internal fatality data, which also includes deaths of contract workers and members of the public, showed two landfill workers were killed on the job that year.