Waste & Recycling Operations: Biological, Chemical and Equipment Hazards Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Waste and recycling operations may look routine, but they involve constant exposure to materials, equipment, and conditions that can quickly become dangerous. Workers handle unknown contents, operate around moving machinery, and work in environments where hazards are not always visible. A single mistake or missed risk can lead to serious injuries, exposure, or long-term health effects, which is why staying aware and following safe practices is critical every day.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Waste and recycling operations combine unknown materials, moving equipment, and changing conditions, which means hazards can appear suddenly and cause serious harm if not controlled. Waste can contain bacteria, viruses, and contaminated materials that may enter the body through cuts, contact, or inhalation, leading to infections, illness, or long-term health issues.

Chemical Hazards

Unknown substances such as cleaning products, fuels, or industrial chemicals can cause burns, respiratory irritation, poisoning, or harmful reactions when mixed or handled improperly.

Equipment and Mechanical Risks

Conveyors, compactors, balers, and loaders create pinch points and caught between hazards, which can result in crushing injuries, amputations, or fatal incidents if guards are bypassed or attention drops.

Sharp Objects and Hidden Dangers

Broken glass, needles, and sharp metals can cause cuts, puncture wounds, and exposure to harmful substances, especially when waste is handled without proper protection.

Unpredictable Materials and Conditions

Waste streams can shift, fall, or contain unexpected items, increasing the risk of struck by injuries, slips, trips, or sudden exposure to hazards that are not immediately visible.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Staying safe in waste and recycling operations means expecting the unexpected, protecting yourself from exposure, and respecting the equipment at all times. The environment changes constantly, so your approach needs to stay consistent.

Protect Against Exposure

Assume all materials may be contaminated and handle them with care. Wear the required PPE and avoid direct contact whenever possible.

- Use gloves, eye protection, and appropriate clothing
- Keep hands away from your face while working
- Wash hands thoroughly before eating, drinking, or leaving the area

Handle Materials Carefully

You never fully know what is in the waste stream. Move materials deliberately and avoid reaching blindly into piles or containers.

- Use tools instead of hands when possible
- Watch for sharp objects like glass or needles
- Keep a safe distance from shifting or unstable loads

Respect Equipment and Moving Parts

Machinery is powerful and unforgiving. Keep guards in place, stay

clear of moving parts, and follow procedures when clearing jams or doing maintenance.

Stay Aware of Your Surroundings

Watch for moving equipment, changing conditions, and other workers. Keep your footing secure and always stay focused on your task.

Act Immediately When Something Feels Unsafe

If you notice a hazard, do not ignore it. Stop work and act before it becomes a serious incident.

- Report spills, leaks, or unsafe conditions right away
- Do not handle unknown substances without guidance
- Get support if the situation involves chemical or biological risk

Stay Consistent Every Day

Safety in waste operations comes from routine. Following the same protective steps every time is what prevents exposure, injuries, and long-term health issues.

FINAL WORD

Waste and recycling work is never as simple as it looks. The risks are often hidden, and they change from one moment to the next. What you do each day is what keeps these risks under control.