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THE DEADLIEST DUST IN THE INDUSTRY

Health and safety in Waste Management and Recycling



THE DEADLIEST UK INDUSTRY: Health & Safety In Waste Management and Recycling

Waste Management and Recycling is a large industry. Estimates suggest that there are around 160,000 workers employed in the UK Waste industry, of which around 120,000 are employed in the private sector.

With that significant size - and the nature of the work - comes serious health and safety risks and hazards. The Waste sector has a rate of fatal injuries around 17 times the average rates of all other industries. Within the sector, private companies typically report around 1,700 to 2,000 accidents per year, with much of the rest residual being reported by local authorities.

Injuries in the Waste Management and Recycling sectors:

- 5,000 workers suffer from work-related ill-health (new or long-standing) each year; 4.1% of workers.
- 5 workers were fatally injured in 2019/2021.
- Over the same five-year period, 30% of deaths were due to contact with moving machinery, 30% were struck by a moving vehicle and 21% were struck by a moving/falling object.
- 4,000 workers sustain nonfatal injuries at work each year:
 - 30% slips, trips & falls
 - 27% handling, lifting or carrying
 - 12% struck by moving, flying/falling object
- Around 3.6% of workers in Waste sustained a workplace injury annually, which is statistically significantly higher than the rate for workers across all industries (1.8%).

Therefore, it is crucial that employers in the industry ensure operational health and safety. When injuries, ill-health, accidents and fatalities such as these happen, it is the employer themselves who is at significant risk of being prosecuted.

Both criminal and civil law apply to workplace health and safety. As an employer, you must protect your workers and others from getting hurt or ill through work.

If you don't:

- a regulator such as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or local authority may take action against you under criminal law
- the person affected may make a claim for compensation against you under civil law

In this guide, we will be taking you through the importance of operational safety, the main hazards in the Waste and Recycling industry, how to report accidents legally, and how to manage health and safety across multiple sites. By the end, you should have a comprehensive understanding of your obligations as an employer to ensure your employees are safe and protected at work in line with the law, and the possible consequences for your business, your employees, and yourself as an employer if you do not.

And remember, we're here to help you every step of the way. Please feel free to get in touch with our experts to chat through anything in this guide that you would like to discuss further.

> > Click here to book your free phone consultation < <



SECTION I.

THE BIGGEST HAZARDS IN THE WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING INDUSTRY

Most accidents in the Waste Management and Recycling industry occur during refuse collection, with significant numbers also occurring during loading/unloading and on-site transfer activities. Injury accidents which cause injuries lasting over seven days account for around 74% of the total number of non-fatal accidents.

The six most common hazards:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Vehicle/pedestrian interaction interface (2/3 of all reported fatalities) | 4. Sharps |
| 2. Manual handling (1/3 of all reported injuries) | 5. Slips and trips (1/3 of all reported injuries) |
| 3. Violence | 6. Occupational noise, particularly in glass collection |

| REVITALISING THEME | KEY FINDINGS |
|---------------------------|--|
| Falls from height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting in and out of vehicle cabs present a risk of falling Greater take-up of training should be encouraged The standards of situational awareness should be raised Communication between company and client premises should be improved Design and use of equipment needs to be improved Safety culture needs to be improved |
| Workplace transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor visibility leading to traffic accidents around refuse collection vehicles Refuse collectors working in streets during busy times Improve training measures and raise awareness of risks Site/management measures need improving Organisations need to improve their in-house systems and culture Regulatory information on good practice for issues such as visibility |
| Slips and trips | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kerbs and footpaths present tripping hazards |
| Musculoskeletal disorders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifting or moving (heavy) containers in awkward positions is a repeated problem Refuse bags have to be lifted to a significant height to be thrown into some refuse collection vehicles Older-style dust bins are still used, and can be particularly difficult to lift The size of some wheeled bins is considered excessive |
| Other health issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cuts from handling sharp objects during collection and sorting Exposure of workers to dust and other emissions is noted, but little information on the health impact is available Violence towards waste workers Excessive noise from glass being tipped into empty chambers at the start of collection rounds |

SECTION 2.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OPERATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

In such a high-risk industry as Waste and Recycling, it is incredibly important to take the appropriate action to reduce risks. No one has to be harmed in your workplace, for an offence to be committed under the Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) – there only has to be a risk of harm.

Therefore, the most important thing is what you do to manage and control risk in the workplace.

If you meet your responsibilities under health and safety law you will considerably reduce the risk of being found negligent under civil law. We're here to help with that.

Key things to address

Below are some common challenges that employers face when it comes to ensuring compliant health and safety in the Waste and Recycling industry, and how to mitigate them:


#1 A competent person

You may not currently have a specific person managing health and safety every day in your business to ensure compliance. This can mean that these key responsibilities get pushed around between people within the business and are not considered and implemented to the standard that they should be. Both physical and online documentation often needs to be updated regularly, making this a full-time responsibility.

WHAT IS A COMPETENT PERSON?

HSE defines a competent person as "someone who has sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities that allow them to assist you properly. The level of competence required will depend on the complexity of the situation and the particular help you need."





The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations state that "Every employer shall, subject to paragraphs (6) and (7), appoint one or more competent persons to assist him in undertaking the measures he needs to take to comply with the requirements and prohibitions imposed upon him by or under the relevant statutory provisions and by Part II of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997."

What you should do:

- [Introduce a competent person](#) – Designate someone internally to take on the role; we can help to provide you with the [required training](#) and resources to ensure that your competent person is able to fulfil the role. Alternatively, our fully trained consultants can [assume the role of competent person for you](#) immediately, taking the stress off you. This can be done as part of [our managed health and safety services](#), which cover all of your health and safety challenges; from the office, through to the yard, to the client's pick-up site.

#2 Insurance

In most cases, employers must have [employers' liability insurance](#). This will enable you to meet the cost of compensation if any of your employees become ill or injured for your employees' injuries or illness. It's a criminal offence if you do not have it.

However, if health and safety is not taken seriously and accidents happen, civil claims build up and insurance premiums can rise. Any claims that are made against you as an employer can result in much higher insurance premiums. It can also be more difficult to obtain this crucial coverage if accidents continuously occur in your workplace.

What you should do:

- [Have a competent person](#) – Your competent person can negotiate a deal with the insurer and keep you on track. We can help advise you on and [provide training courses](#) for your competent person, or act as the competent person for your business through our popular managed health and safety services.
- [Demonstrate safe practices](#) – We have clients who have used [our Safety Cloud software](#) to prove to insurance companies that they are managing health and safety appropriately. This has allowed them to negotiate insurance premium reductions.

- [Avoid claims for accidents that could be easily prevented](#) – With appropriate H&S health and safety training and [bespoke H&S risk assessments](#), accidents can be avoided. Undertaking these measures can also make the process of securing an insurer much cheaper, as you can evidence that you're carefully managing safety risks in your business. [Find out more about our health and safety training and assessment services here.](#)

Key opportunities for better health and safety management

Below are some of the key opportunities available to employers in Waste Management and Recycling to further engage with health and safety in their business, and the additional benefits they can bring.

#1 Leading from the top

Ensuring employees take health and safety seriously can be a challenge, and how to do it most effectively can be difficult to ascertain. An [HSE survey](#) of key stakeholders in the Waste and Recycling industry found that "to influence company culture, organisational structure, and health and safety management [...] need to control training and management/supervision to influence competence, teamwork, communications, and compliance within the workforce."

This means that employers need to ensure that they are conveying the importance of health and safety to their employees from the top down - both in messaging and through workplace policies - so that it becomes a shared responsibility between everyone in the business. Not only does this reduce the risk of accidents – it can also bring a whole host of other benefits too.

Additionally, one of the requirements of ISO 450001 is for senior managers to be involved with the health and safety process. Gaining accreditations such as this can help to give your business an edge over the competition, so it is important for you as an employer to ensure you are actively involved in health and safety.



The benefits:

- [Reputation management](#) – Implementing and enforcing compliant health and safety measures can help to protect the image of your business – within the industry, among clients, with investors, and with potential employees.
- [Better relationship with employees](#) – By proving to employees that their management cares about their health, safety and wellbeing, your employees will be more engaged in health and safety compliance.
- [Shared responsibility](#) - Making it feel like the whole company is responsible for health and wellbeing, whether you're at the top or on site.
- [Job security](#) - Safeguarding workplaces results not only in employees being safe but also in protecting their jobs (for example, avoiding fines as a result of prosecutions, which can negatively impact business and end in staff cuts).



#2 Recruiting and retraining staff

You may find recruiting new workers difficult in some circumstances in the Waste and Recycling industry. Landfill is declining due to the UK's legislative approach requiring more recycling and less landfill and, as such, landfill is a less popular career choice within the Waste industry. There is also currently a driver shortage affecting UK industry as a whole.

Additionally, recruitment and retention may become an issue in the Waste industry over the next 10 years due to demographic changes and increased demand.

It's also easy to fall behind on health and safety training for current staff, leading to a lack up-to-date training within the business and therefore an increased risk of accidents, which can negatively impact staff morale.

So, it's important that businesses do what they can to be as attractive as possible to potential and current employees. Appropriate health and safety can help with that, by reflecting a positive attitude towards staff wellbeing and giving businesses an edge over their competition.

The benefits:

- [Reinvigorate the industry](#) – Helping to reenergise the industry to attract (and retain) more employees.
- [Improving the experience of younger recruits](#) – By making sure younger staff are trained correctly from the second they step onto the site. Also, a safer environment can help the younger generation to consider a career in Waste and Recycling by reducing fears of long-term health consequences.
- [Re-engaging with current employees](#) – Regular health and safety training can help to refocus current employees, while listening to their main concerns regarding safety onsite. [Our Safety Cloud software](#) is fantastic for accessible and cost-effective staff training – and it also provides you with access to Observation Logs, providing the perfect solution for tracking safety concerns between audits.

Considering online compliance management?

Book your free demo to see the advantages in action, from streamlined processes and task delegation to on-the-spot compliance performance snapshots from any device. Safety Cloud provides a unified platform for your entire safety management programme, so you can move forward with clarity and confidence.

>> Put Safety Cloud to the test with a free demo <<



SECTION 3

ACCIDENT REPORTING

Safety management only works when you know exactly where you stand – when you understand what’s causing accidents across your business. The only way to know that is through accident reporting. Both a legal requirement and a helpful way to keep track of workplace health and safety, accident reporting is an important tool for identifying any shortcomings in your health and safety compliance.

When it comes to accident reporting, your legal obligations are governed by the Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999 and the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013.

To be compliant with RIDDOR, there are specified workplace incidents you must report to the HSE; not all accidents are reportable, though it is wise to track any accident internally. We can report RIDDOR notifications on your behalf as part of our Premium service to take some of the stress off your shoulders. Premium Southalls service reports RIDDOR notifications on the clients behalf, the consultant liaises with the client to agree the notification and the submits this for the client.

The seven reportable categories under RIDDOR are:

1. Deaths
2. Specified injuries
3. Injuries of over seven consecutive days
4. Injuries to people not at work
5. Some work-related diseases
6. Dangerous occurrences
7. Gas incidents

Safety Cloud makes it easy to report accidents and view all accident reports in one place. Centralised incident and accident records provide instant access to key documents for claims and investigations – all in workable, web-based formats.

>> Learn more <<



The MHSW Regulations cover all the stages you should be taking to prevent incidents and accidents in the first place. It requires you to assess and manage all risks that arise from any work-related activity.

So, this means taking all reasonable steps to ensure incidents and accidents are avoided in the first place by:

- Appointing a competent person and/or advisor to assist with the implementation and management of safety within the workplace
- Conducting, communicating and reviewing risk assessments
- Drawing up method statements to demonstrate your safe working practices
- Putting health and safety handbooks and policies in place – that are clearly communicated, understood and acknowledged
- Ensuring employees are up to date with relevant health and safety training
- Providing employees with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Making sure all your equipment and machinery is fit for purpose, regularly maintained and fitted with things like machine guarding where necessary
- Only allowing employees to carry out tasks if they're competent to do so

Please contact our health and safety experts here for further advice on accident reporting and how we can help. We can arrange a free Safety Cloud demonstration for you with one of our experts, so you can see first-hand how straightforward accident reporting can be with the right solution.

>> Put Safety Cloud to the test with a free demo <<

SECTION 4

MANAGING MULTIPLE SITES AND EMPLOYEES

With expansion comes greater responsibility. As turnover increases so too does the level of fine you would receive in the event of prosecution for a health and safety breach. It is important for the board of directors to remember that you can't absolve yourself of responsibility through delegation.

Although health and safety functions can be delegated, legal responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of workers and for reducing risks to others affected by work activities (including members of the public) rests on employers (Sections 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). Consequently, you need to find a way to manage safety across all of your sites.

#1 Communication and consistency

Between sites and to head office. Appointing external safety consultants to cover all sites on a six-monthly audit basis can provide a cost-effective and reassuring way to ensure standards remain consistent.

#2 Cohesive approach

Ensuring cohesion of vision across locations takes constant attention, even in small enterprises. Foster a sense of cohesion through business meetings at a different site each time or bringing teams together for a joint training program.

#3 Safety culture

Building and maintaining a positive safety culture across multiple sites is a challenge. All branches need to work to the same risk assessments and policies, provide necessary safety training for staff and ensure managers lead by example to breed a positive culture from the top down. It is important to appoint someone at each site to take ownership of day-to-day responsibility for safety. That can be someone internal, or we can assume the role of competent person for you.

#4 Cloud-based health and safety software

As your business expands, paper-based systems and multiple spreadsheets to manage health and safety can breed a variety of problems that impact on the business' level of compliance.

Cloud-based health and safety management software such as Safety Cloud helps everyone to take the same approach every time by ensuring the same processes are used to collect information in the same way. This will give you a consistent set of data across departments, sites, and countries and result in fewer errors and gaps in compliance.

Safety Cloud delivers the answers you need – and more – by connecting everything about compliance across one easy-to-access platform. Delivering made-to-measure preferences for any size business, across single sites or multinationals.

> > [Learn more](#) < <

Want to learn more?

Southalls offer a range of managed health and safety services and bespoke assessments for Waste Management and Recycling companies to make health and safety compliance that much easier. To book a free software demonstration or a consultation, or to simply learn more about how we can help you to protect your business and employees, visit us at www.southalls.com.



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