

**GMB**

**GMB@WORK**



GMB working for health & safety

# DANGER@WORK

## IN WASTE & RECYCLING COLLECTION

Many GMB members work in the waste and recycling collection industry. They are working in private and in public organisations, right across the UK. Many collection methods have evolved over a number of years, and training is often given on the job by more experienced operatives, who may well pass on some bad health and safety practices along with good practical advice on how to do the job. These GMB guidelines aim to fill the advice gap left by the industry's failure to provide any and to help you to do the job more safely. 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 become an officially appointed and trained GMB Safety Representative by speaking to your local GMB Officer.

Join GMB, the union for all waste and recycling collection staff and ensure you receive the same protection and advice as thousands of your colleagues.

## WASTE COLLECTION

The collection of waste, however it is disposed of or treated, is often taken for granted in our modern society. People'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. The attitude is often one of **"I pay my council tax and that's just part of the service."**

For those who collect waste however, the reality of the situation is very often different. Waste collection is a statutory duty as it is an obvious public health hazard. Irrespective of the waste being 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.



## VEHICLES

Refuse & recycling vehicles come in all shapes and sizes. Due to increasing demands in terms of volumes of waste, or larger routes to collect from, some of the vehicles take a real hammering. So much so that in recent years some fleet managers have looked to replace the hoppers, while retaining the cabs and chassis, half-way through their expected life.

Some of the surfaces, at landfill or waste transfer stations, where the rubbish is tipped might be very uneven, or the streets where collections are carried out can be narrow or full of parked vehicles. These can all contribute to the roadworthiness of the vehicles.

It is important that the vehicle is checked properly and on a regular basis, before leaving the depot. It is important that that vehicle is not used if anything is not working properly. Of course, there will be pressure to drive vehicles with minor defects but this should be resisted. It's not only your license that's at stake. It might be someone's life.

## EQUIPMENT

With changes in methods of collection over recent years some of the equipment is often complex and dangerous. NO ONE should operate any equipment on a vehicle without first having had proper and thorough training on all aspects of the equipment. All vehicles and their equipment must be maintained and monitored continuously.

## DANGERS

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.

## 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 "Paladins" or "Eurobins" might lead to excessive muscle strain. Waste may have to be collected from restricted spaces, such as cupboards, or carried up stairs which can add to the problem. Manual handling training, sometimes called 'kinetic lifting 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.

## EVERYDAY HAZARDS

In a job dealing with the public and their throwaway society 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 may be "asked" to move a vehicle or some rubbish with the encouragement of a weapon. Or then again there is just 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 doesn't have to be too dangerous.

# If you are not yet a member of GMB JOIN TODAY

## 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 the 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 counseling 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.

## REVERSING VEHICLES

Even with modern technology, such as cab installed CCTV, there are blind spots on refuse vehicles. Children in particular are fascinated by waste collection trucks and the elderly may not hear any warning noises. For everyone's safety an operator, sometimes referred to as a "banksman" should ensure safe reversing. Get training on the correct signalling to use when reversing and ensure that there is no misunderstanding of signals or directions.

## PROCUREMENT OF WASTE SERVICES

Good health and safety begins before any round leaves the depot, this applies to the standards set down before the contract for the service is even let. 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.

## TRAFFIC

Routes should be planned so busy 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.

## 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.

## 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 compostible 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, "Paladins" or "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.



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## TASK & FINISH

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.

## PETS

Most family pets are reasonably harmless. However some animals, particularly 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.

## 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 be consulted in good time over a number of areas including:

- The introduction of any measure which may substantially affect the health and safety of the members they represent.
- The arrangements for appointing the competent person.
- Any health and safety information they are required to provide.
- The planning and organisation of any health and safety training.
- The consequences of the introduction, including the planning of any new technology into the workplace.

In addition the regulations relating to the GMB Safety Rep also give them the right to inspect the workplace and work equipment on a regular basis or after an accident and to inspect documents relating to health and safety. They also have the right to represent their members to management and the right to ask for a workplace health and safety committee to be established.

## 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 "toetector" 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 and GMB Safety Reps should be consulted, and if possible try out any PPE before general issue.

## WHEN YOU ARE HURT AT WORK

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

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. They will also get you to fill in the necessary form (TU56) to trigger a claim against your employer to get you compensation for your injury and any loss of earnings or disability resulting from the incident. 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.



## 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.

# SAY YES TO SECURITY AT WORK

As a GMB member you are much more **secure** at work because you are part of an **effective** union of 610,000 members. Whether you work full-time or part-time—whatever job you do—GMB can **help** you.

# GMB

## GMB@WORK

## HOW DO I JOIN? JOIN ONLINE AT WWW.GMB.ORG.UK

Or just fill in parts 1, 2 and 3 below and hand the form to your local GMB representative or post it to GMB, FREEPOST (WC2268), London SW19 4YY (you do not need a stamp).

If you have any questions call GMB on

# 020 8947 3131

visit our website [www.gmbunion.org.uk](http://www.gmbunion.org.uk)  
or email [info@gmb.org.uk](mailto:info@gmb.org.uk)

**FOR UNION USE ONLY** Section    Branch No    Membership No         Date of joining

## GMB membership application form PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

### 1 TELL US ABOUT YOU

Surname	<input type="text"/>	First name	<input type="text"/>	Title	<input type="text"/> Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr	Date of birth	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Home address	<input type="text"/>		Home Tel	<input type="text"/>		Email	<input type="text"/>		
	Postcode		Mobile	<input type="text"/>		I agree to abide by GMB rules	Signature <input type="text"/>		
Date	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	We ask for your ethnic origins as part of our equal opportunities policy of improving services to all members Bangladeshi <input type="checkbox"/> / Black African <input type="checkbox"/> / Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> / Black British <input type="checkbox"/> / Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> / Indian <input type="checkbox"/> / Irish <input type="checkbox"/> / Pakistani <input type="checkbox"/> / White <input type="checkbox"/> / Other: <input type="text"/>					

### 2 TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOB

Employer	<input type="text"/>	Your job/trade	<input type="text"/>	
Address where you work	<input type="text"/>		Your current employer (if unemployed last employer)	<input type="text"/>
	Postcode		Your current work site (or last site worked on)	<input type="text"/>

### 3 INSTRUCTION TO YOUR BANK OR BUILDING SOCIETY TO PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT



Please fill in the form and send to **GMB, 22–24 Worples Road, London SW19 4DD**

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society branch

To the Manager of	<input type="text"/>	Bank/Building Society
Address	<input type="text"/>	
	Postcode	

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Bank/Building Society Account Number

Bank/Building Society Sort Code

Reference number (Office use only)

Originator's Identification Number

9  7  4  3  3  0

For GMB official use only. This is not part of the instruction to your Bank/Building Society. If your A/C number is not available fill in your address below.

#### Instructions to your Bank or Building Society.

Please pay GMB Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with GMB and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s)

Date

Banks or Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

## STRESS

Just because the job involves mostly physical work doesn't mean that GMB members cannot suffer from stress. Stress can occur in any occupation and arises from exposure to unnecessary pressure, or a lack of control over a task. In modern society this could be down to excessive traffic causing knock on delays to collections which are then compounded when sitting or operating in peak traffic flow, when normally the collection would have been completed much earlier. In addition 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 and it easy to see why stressful situations can arise.

Management have a clear responsibility to protect GMB members from as much risk as possible. This will include stress and as a minimum they should be adopting the HSE Stress Management Standards. These cover such areas as the demands of the job, which included workload, work patterns and the work environment; and how organisational change is managed, consulted on and communicated within any organisation. Much of this can be addressed if the risk assessments are carried out by competent persons.

## 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 and 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.

## WHAT IS YOUR EMPLOYER'S RECORD ON H&S?

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 ever thing 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.

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

