



Best Practices to Reduce Musculoskeletal Injuries in Solid Waste Workers

Collecting trash and recycling continues to be one of the most hazardous occupations in America today. Sanitation collection has consistently been ranked 5th or 6th by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, behind such highly visible occupations as crab fishing and logging. While not glamorized by successful television shows such as *Deadliest Catch*, municipal leaders should recognize the high frequency and high costs of injuries to solid waste collectors. Musculoskeletal injuries, especially to the backs and shoulders of collectors are the most common, among the most costly, and can be the most-life altering injuries. The Safety Director recommends the following actions to protect collectors.

On the part of municipal administrators

Town leaders set the tone and the baseline for a safe operation.

- The ultimate solution is to consider automated trucks where possible. Statistics demonstrate that the use of automated solid waste collection trucks significantly reduce back and shoulder injuries. Conversion may be phased in as the collection fleet ages and is replaced.
- Where automated vehicles are not practical and manual collection must still be used, enact an ordinance on the size and weight of trash and recycling containers. Fifty pounds is recommended and common.
- The ordinance should specify penalties for repeated non-compliance.
- Widely advertise the specifics of the ordinance to homeowners through Welcome Packages, stories in the local television and print media, notices on the town's website, and at events such as annual Night Out. Explain the toll of over-size and over-weight containers on local workers, who are often their neighbors.

On the part of the Department supervisors

Department supervisors are the critical conduit between the town administrators and employees in the field.

- Make sure employees know and can explain the reason behind the local ordinance to residents.
- Develop procedures for when an over-size or over-weight container is found on the route. The homeowner will need to be notified and educated why their trash can was not emptied. The address will need to be documented and a database of repeat offenders developed.
- Hold frequent safety briefings on lifting, getting on and off rear steps, traffic hazards, and more.
- Most importantly, support your collectors when they find an over-weight or over-sized container.

On the part of the Collectors

Collectors have the most immediate impact on their own safety.

- Come to work prepared; hydrated, nourished, and warmed-up
- "Tip" each can to test its weight before fully committing to lift the container into the truck
- Assist coworkers with heavy containers or awkward items. Don't wait to be asked, take the initiative.
- Follow your department's procedures for reporting over-sized or over-weight containers. Take the time to educate residents and neighbors on the ordinance. The back you save may be your own.

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.