

Managing 'task and finish' to reduce safety risks

This 'good practice' guidance was written in consultation and with the support of the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum (WISH). It does not aim to be comprehensive but give examples of good practice within the industry.

It is aimed at waste and recycling collection round managers, their supervisory staff, and safety professionals within the industry.

The publications listed in *Further reading* contain additional information that you may find useful to consider alongside this guidance.

The practice of 'task and finish' (T&F) in the collection of municipal waste, material for recycling and street cleaning operations has the potential to adversely affect the health and safety of workers if it is not properly managed and controlled. Quantifiable evidence of the impact of T&F on operational safety is not available; however, there is anecdotal evidence that when not properly managed, T&F may encourage workers to rush the job and take potentially dangerous short cuts. This is not to say that T&F practices necessarily have to be dangerous or unsafe.

With appropriate control measures in place, used and maintained, T&F operations can be as safe as non-T&F operations, but will require more management and supervisory control.

European and national waste management and recycling targets are resulting in significant changes to municipal waste management across the UK. These changing practices provide operators and local authorities with the opportunity to evaluate their approach to collecting municipal waste and material for recycling, and to make sure that improved safety is designed into the operating practices that result from such reviews.

The following issues have been identified as potential contributors to, or resulting from, poorly managed T&F operations. Appropriate management controls and good practice are suggested for each issue.

References to 'waste/recycling operations' should be taken to include the collection of wastes, recyclables and compostable material; street cleaning; and other similar municipal cleaning activities.

General good management practices

- Communicate and consult with collection crews so that working practices can be designed to ensure their health and safety. If change is necessary, staff and their representatives should be given the opportunity to contribute.
- Day-to-day communication with crews during their working day is important. Establish effective radio, mobile phone or other means of electronic communication.

- Design collection rounds to eliminate or minimise running, loading into moving vehicles and the need to take short cuts across grassy banks and slippery or uneven surfaces.
- Monitor start and finish times for collection crews so that workloads can be evenly distributed between collection rounds and emerging poor practice can be identified and investigated.
- Monitor accident rates, particularly minor road accidents and slips, trips and falls.
- Monitor vehicle payloads/tipping weights, particularly where seasonal changes are expected.
- Encourage drivers and collection operatives to take regular breaks to recoup and replenish themselves.
- Monitor the taking of breaks through tachograph and other similar mechanisms.
- Proactively identify periods when there may be particular problems (eg extremely hot or cold weather) and adopt suitable measures to control the risks that result.

Successful health and safety management HSG65¹ sets out the principles of effective management.

Risk assessment

The following sections identify some of the areas where T&F practices may have an impact and suggest possible measures to control those risks. This is not an exhaustive list.

Where operations take place within a T&F framework, your risk assessment should consider the potential effects of T&F; use it to identify the controls necessary to ensure that the system operates safely. Identify and implement appropriate and specific control measures.

'Individual team' versus 'group' T&F

Two types of T&F operation have historically been employed:

- 'individual team' T&F, where the working day is over for the members of a particular working team (typically a single collection crew) when it has completed its individual task; and
- 'group' T&F where the working day is over when all working teams from the depot have completed all the tasks (eg when all of the day's collection activities are complete).

Group T&F operations can promote good team spirit and are less likely to lead to rushing and short cuts being taken (as there is less perceived personal gain from doing so).

Both types of T&F operations can impact on sites receiving waste where a significant proportion of an operating fleet arrive near simultaneously to tip off or park up. Where that location has limited traffic capacity or existing traffic management issues, a sudden rush can significantly increase the risk of collision or injury. Identify such issues by risk assessment and put in place suitable controls to reduce the risk (eg by staggering vehicle returns).

Good management practice

- Use group T&F rather than individual team T&F operations.
- Identify and address potential knock-on effects to waste receiving sites.

Point of start and finish

There are occasions where it is both necessary and desirable for staff to begin work in widely dispersed locations, eg in rural districts with centres of population that are widely separated. Even in urban locations, the starting and finishing points for work of team members are not always a depot or similar facility. For example, it is not uncommon for team members to be picked up en-route to a collection round and dropped off when the collection round is complete.

Collection or drop-off points that are away from the depot can reduce the level of contact the organisation has with individuals. In particular, this practice can reduce an employee's access to information, training, personal protective equipment (PPE) stores, equipment and good hygiene facilities. Reduction in regular contact between supervision, management and field operatives also reduces management awareness of day-to-day problems and concerns of the field operatives.

While operational systems that result in field operatives having limited access to depot facilities are not inherently less safe, greater efforts need to be made to address the issues that might arise.

Good management practice

The following hierarchy, when applied in the design and maintenance of waste/recycling operations, can ensure effective communication and control:

- require the operatives to start and finish their shifts at the depot every working day; or
- where this cannot be achieved, ensure that operatives start and finish their shift at the depot on a regular basis (eg on one day each week); or
- ensure that crews/individual workers who cannot attend the depot are provided with the same quality and quantity of training, information and supervision as those who go to the depot every working day.

Potential health impacts

Working with municipal waste/recyclates has the potential for exposure to a significant range of hazardous substances, including rotting food, blood contaminated products, faeces and a wide range of household chemicals.

Poorly managed T&F operations may encourage workers to neglect good hygiene practices or lead to failure to wear and adequately maintain appropriate PPE.

There is emerging evidence that in the kerbside collection of glass, some practices aimed at improving the speed of collection may substantially increase noise, to which operatives are then exposed. The impact of working practices on noise from glass collections should be considered when collection processes are being designed and during regular review of noise control measures.

Matters such as eating and smoking on the collection round, not washing before and after visiting the toilet, not washing appropriately during and after shifts and taking contamination into the home or other clean areas may all result in adverse health effects to employees and others. Where workers do not return to a depot (or other place) where there are substantial welfare facilities and supervision, the potential for poor hygiene practices to develop, and the potential for health impacts, is significantly increased.

Good management practice

- Provide a detailed programme of information, education and training for good hygiene practices, which is regularly reviewed and repeated.
- Ensure that all employees have access to suitable welfare facilities and that those facilities are maintained in a high standard of cleanliness at all times.
- Ensure that all employees wear appropriate PPE at all times, and that PPE is properly cared for and maintained.
- Ensure that working practices do not increase noise in the kerbside collection of glass.
- Make hygiene practices a frequent matter of inspection, or review when supervising crews and individual workers.

Enforcing safe working practices

Waste/recycling collection operations are particularly vulnerable to 'short cuts' and 'workarounds' due to the desire to finish the allotted task in the shortest possible time. Practices that are important to good health, safety and welfare but perceived as 'slowing down the job' may be among the first things to be 'short cut' or 'worked around'.

When devising and implementing safety-critical procedures, you need to include a suitable education and training campaign (so that employees understand the importance of complying with procedures) and make sure that frequent and effective supervision of the safety critical elements is included within the overall operating regime. Supervisors with an appropriate, positive, approach to health, safety and welfare can have a significant influence in disseminating and maintaining a high standard of health and safety in the teams that they have contact with. All levels of the management chain (including crew leaders, chargehands etc) have a vital role to play in setting an example and in promoting and enforcing safe working practices. Avoid 'turning a blind eye'.

Good management practice

- Effective and frequent supervision and monitoring of crews and individual workers is essential to ensure safe working practices are followed.
- The job role of 'on-the-street' supervisors should include health and safety supervision duties. This role should be properly understood and supervisors trained to perform these duties.
- All layers of management should be made aware of the importance of leading by example and of making sure that the working environment positively encourages poor practices to be identified and rectified.
- Regularly monitor and review policies and procedures to ensure that what should happen does happen. Pay particular attention to the role of individuals in the management chain, from senior executives to those at risk.

Driving practices

Driving operations are the subject of separate guidance – see *Waste and recycling vehicles in street collection*.²

Bad driving practices may have a significant impact on health and safety and may be aggravated and encouraged by poorly managed T&F operations. For example, the desire to complete the collection round at the earliest possible time may encourage drivers to skimp or skip essential drivers' checks, to speed, to attempt difficult manoeuvres too quickly or without adequate assistance, and to encourage loading while moving.

Good management practice

- Closely monitor driving related incidents and near hits.
- Carry out regular driving competency assessments (both announced and unannounced).
- Appropriate retraining and specialist training for drivers where necessary.
- Promote and encourage good driving, while deterring and discouraging bad driving, by the use of appropriate campaigns, promotions and incentive schemes.

Collection round design and management

A number of factors will influence collection round design and management, including contract structure, client requirements, changing residential structures and seasonal influences. Well-designed collection rounds can reduce the pressure on collection operatives to rush, run or take short cuts.

Where collection duties are contracted out, the client and the contractor have duties to ensure that issues are fully addressed.

Good management practice

- When developing new collection contracts, assess the impact on the health, safety and welfare of workers and others and define the risk control measures.
- The collection round should be 'balanced' at the outset of the contract.
- Put in place suitable procedures to monitor workloads and to review the structure of the collection round for seasonal and longer-term changes.

Overloading of trucks

Even where vehicles are equipped with weighing devices, badly managed T&F practices can contribute to or substantially worsen vehicle overloading.

A high standard of monitoring vehicle weight tickets for overloading, coupled with good supervision and management, can be effective in ensuring that vehicles are not overloaded.

T&F practices are only a contributor to overloading; other major factors, such as weather conditions, seasonal changes in waste volume or density and waste/recycling collection round design also contribute. Application of good management practices can reduce the risk of overloading.

Good management practice

- Maintain a high standard of monitoring vehicle weights, including effective systems to feed results back to drivers and manage overloading issues that are identified.
- Correctly use appropriate weighing devices to ensure collection rounds are 'balanced'.

Slips and trips

Slips, trips and falls are the largest source of injury in the waste industry. Rushing, running and other similar 'time saving' practices that T&F operations can encourage are likely to result in an increase in both the number and severity of injuries.

A well-designed collection round and careful supervision in the field can reduce the incentive to rush, and can act as a control to prevent unsafe practices developing.

Good management practice

- Ensure that collection rounds are balanced regularly.
- Give clear messages about expected behaviour in respect of running, rushing etc.
- Make sure operatives know about the potential severity of injuries that can result from running or rushing collection rounds.
- Have effective and frequent field supervision.

Manual handling and overloading of collection operatives

Collection operatives lift, carry, pull and empty hundreds of bags, bins, wheelie bins and boxes each working day. These receptacles are presented in a wide variety of ways for collection, will vary in weight and contents, and may also need to be carried or pulled significant distances or across and around obstacles, eg other vehicles, steps, kerbs etc.

Manual handling is one of the major sources of accidents in the waste/recycling industry and can be responsible for debilitating long-term injuries.

There is significant potential for musculoskeletal injuries to arise while lifting, carrying and emptying these receptacles, particularly as changing waste/recycling management practices can affect the size, design, weight or frequency of collection of receptacles at each residence. The risk of musculoskeletal injury can be increased when collection staff carry as much as possible in an attempt to save time, eg four or six bags, or when pushing and pulling more than one wheelie bin at a time. This may save time but is likely to increase the overall risk of injury. Discourage the practice of direct manual loading of bagged 'side' waste into bin-lift equipped vehicles, which are not suited or designed for direct manual loading, rather than loading such waste by first placing it into a wheeled bin.

Good management practice

- Have frequent and effective field supervision.
- Ensure that material for collection is easily accessible, placed at the curtilage where possible.
- Ensure that the collection method used is the most appropriate for the collection round and will ensure the health and safety of workers, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Use appropriately designed receptacles and vehicles.
- Collection operatives should be able to undertake all manual handling operations competently. Training and assessment can be used to ensure competence.
- Skepping and similar practices should not be permitted.

Safety mechanisms

Safety devices on refuse collection vehicles should not be defeated to speed up the collection activity. Typical examples include overriding safety controls to reduce packing cycle times or to increase packing cycle pressures on refuse collection vehicles. A number of serious safety issues can arise as a result, which vary from the obvious (operatives will have less time to avoid machinery which moves more quickly), to the indirect (overriding safety interlocks can disable apparently unrelated emergency stops and other safety controls).

Ensuring that operatives are aware of the function and importance of safety controls, as well as the potential dangers of interfering with them, is important in discouraging such practices developing.

Effective field supervision, along with close monitoring of vehicle weights and collection round balance, can allow such activities to be detected. Where such activities are suspected, they should be thoroughly investigated and decisive action taken.

Good management practice

- Have effective, regular procedures to check that safety mechanisms are working properly.
- Investigate the root cause where safety mechanisms are defeated and identify if 'time saving' is encouraging workers to defeat safety mechanisms.

Loading reversing vehicles

Vehicles should never be loaded when reversing. For additional guidance on reversing operations see *Waste and recycling vehicles in street collection*.²

Good management practice

- Have a strict ban on loading when a vehicle is reversing.
- Have frequent and effective field supervision.

New and temporary crew members

New, temporary and agency staff within any crew may need time to build up their strength and stamina. This has the potential to affect the speed and effectiveness of a team. Crews should be encouraged and able to make adjustments to support the introduction of new team members.

If poorly managed, T&F operations can lead to new crew members being 'pushed' to compete with their more experienced team mates, leading to fatigue or exhaustion and an increased likelihood of misjudgement or injury.

Train supervisors to engage in open dialogue with front-line operatives, to recognise the signs of peer pressure, and to build trust with the workforce to deal with difficult situations.

Induction training, appropriate use of PPE, checking that operatives understand and follow work procedures and risk assessments, and the need for support and communication are all of increased importance when dealing with new, temporary and agency staff.

Good management practice

- Closely supervise new crew members. Follow-up on induction training and monitoring during the probationary period.
- Give team members a mentoring role to provide support for new crew members.
- Where there are team or supervisory concerns that the worker and the crew are unsuited, consider an early review of alternative options.
- Provide a visibly effective whistle-blowing policy or mechanism for collection crews to identify health and safety concerns.

- Encourage front-line operatives to talk openly and without fear to supervisory staff.

Pulling out in advance

Collection crews often split into two groups, one that 'pulls out' (going in front of the vehicle and pulling the waste and recyclables out on the kerbside) for the second group to load into the vehicle.

Where the first group 'pulls out' beyond the line of sight of the vehicle there is an increased danger to the public (due for example to bags blocking pavements and forcing pedestrians into the road), the pulling-out crew (due to increased lone working) and an increased workload on the loading crew (leading to increased risks of manual handling injury).

Good management practice

- Working practices should only permit 'pulling out' in sight of the vehicle. Where appropriate stipulate this in the collection contract and collection round design statements.
- Where 'pulling out' is undertaken there should be frequent rotation of crew members between pulling out and loading to reduce manual handling risks.
- Have effective and frequent field supervision.

Single and double-sided working

On average, refuse collection operatives cross public roads up to 500 times a day. Eliminating double-sided collection, particularly on roads with a high traffic density, will greatly reduce worker exposure to road hazards.

Where vehicles (including motorcycles) can pass a collection vehicle, it is likely that single-side collection will be appropriate.

Collection round design should always prefer single-sided working. Collection round design should only incorporate double-sided working where other vehicles cannot pass the collection vehicle, or where the use of double-sided working results in an overall reduction of risk associated with the collection activity.

Good management practice

- Collection procedures and operative training should emphasise the need to cross public roads as little as possible.
- Collection round design should prefer single-side working over double-side working in all cases.
- Have frequent and effective field supervision to make sure that procedures and collection round design are complied with.

Loading bins onto vehicle

Many modern designs of collection vehicle feature multiple bin lifts or emptying devices that can be operated independently. Whenever bins or other collection receptacles are lifted to be emptied there is the danger of waste or a collection receptacle falling from height onto any person who is standing nearby or striking a person as it completes its cycle. Time-saving practices that involve one operative putting the bin onto the vehicle while another operates the loading mechanism should be avoided and actively discouraged.

Operating controls are typically placed in locations that are away from or defended from falling bins or debris. Where the correct practice of the operative loading the bin into the emptying mechanism and then moving to and operating the controls is observed, the operative should not be exposed to falling items or entrapment in the lifting device.

Good management practice

- The same person who puts the bin onto the vehicle should operate the loading mechanism.
- Have frequent and effective field supervision.

Summary of good practice guidance	General management	Type of T&F operation	Point of start and finish	Potential health impact	Enforcing safe working	Driving practices	Collection round design and management	Vehicle overloading	Slips and trips	Manual handling	Safety mechanisms	Loading bins and reversing	New crew members	Pulling out	Single and double-sided working
Effective two-way communication with crews, including access to crews at start and finish of collection rounds	X		X				X		X		X		X		
Make safety a key feature of collection round design	X		X				X							X	X
Monitor start and finish times of crews	X						X								
Monitor accident rates	X								X						
Monitor payloads and tipping weights	X						X	X							
Encourage staff to take regular breaks, monitor through tachograph or other mechanisms	X														
Proactively identify and prepare for problem periods	X														
Use group T&F practices in preference to individual team T&F		X													

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Identify and address knock-on effects of T&F to waste receiving sites		X													
Adopt a training and education programme on good hygiene practices				X											
Ensure all employees have access to suitable welfare facilities, and that welfare facilities are suitably maintained				X									X		
Monitor and control noise levels in kerbside glass collection				X											
Ensure effective supervision of crews and compliance with safe working practices (including PPE wearing)				X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ensure all layers of supervision and management lead by example and tackle poor practices				X	X				X	X					
Regularly review policies and procedures					X										
Monitor driving related incidents and near hits	X					X									
Have a regime to assess driver competency						X									

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Promote and encourage good driving while deterring and discouraging bad driving						X									
Ensure that material for collection is accessible and that the collection method is the most appropriate for safety							X		X	X		X			
Ensure that operatives, including new workers, agency staff and temporary workers, are suitably trained and monitored													X	X	X
Assign a mentoring role to a team member to support new (etc) crew members													X		
Ensure that a visibly effective whistle-blowing policy is in place													X		
Only permit 'pulling out' in the line of sight of the vehicle														X	
Ensure that 'pulling out' is regularly rotated between crew members														X	
Ensure that procedures and training emphasise the need to avoid crossing public roads so far as is practicable															X

References and further reading

1 *Successful health and safety management* HSG65 (Second edition) HSE Books 1997 ISBN 978 0 7176 1276 5

2 *Waste and recycling vehicles in street collection* Waste04 HSE 2006
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This document contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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