

Solid Waste Vehicles: Rider Safety



“A 22-year-old solid waste employee died this week when he fell off the truck.” That’s a real headline from 2023, and similar incidents aren’t uncommon around the country. The tragic headline and others like it show that solid waste collection operations pose a serious danger to employees. Solid waste personnel should always stay R.O.A.D. Ready by continuously: (1) recognizing the hazards; (2) observing people, processes, and equipment; (3) assessing the risk level; and (4) determining the safest course of action. Doing so while following this step-by-step guide will allow solid waste employees to execute their responsibilities effectively, while minimizing the risks associated with collecting refuse.

1. **Vehicle Inspections:** Regular and thorough inspections of sanitation trucks ensure they are in optimal working condition. Ensure trucks have back up alarm devices to warn passersby of the truck movement. A well-maintained fleet is key to preventing breakdowns and reducing the risk of accidents.
2. **Training:** Ongoing defensive driving training is essential for promoting safe driving habits. Proper lifting techniques should be emphasized for workers.
3. **Route Planning and Awareness:** Efficient route planning enhances operational effectiveness and contributes to safety. Take appropriate steps to deal with weather and other factors.
4. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** All employees, including drivers and accompanying crew members, should be trained to recognize hazardous waste and be equipped with necessary personal protective equipment, including high-visibility clothing, gloves, and steel-toed boots. Adherence to PPE guidelines is fundamental to reducing the risk of accidents and injuries.
5. **Communication Protocols:** Establish clear communication protocols within the team. Drivers should be in constant communication with their crew members during operations. Use of two-way radios or other communication devices is encouraged to maintain a seamless flow of information, particularly in noisy or busy environments.
6. **Emergency Response Preparedness:** Conduct regular drills to prepare personnel for emergency situations. Ensure that all team members are familiar with emergency response procedures, including evacuation plans, first aid, and the proper use of fire extinguishers.
7. **Report Incidents:** Encourage a culture of reporting incidents, near misses, and potential hazards. Implement a reporting system that allows personnel to share their observations without fear of reprisal. This information is invaluable for continuous improvement in safety protocols.

Resources

- TMLIRP LocalGovU [Online Learning Center](#): The First 15 Minutes Decision Making at Roadway incidents, Traffic Incident Management, Understanding the MUTCD, and Work Zone Safety for Local Governments
- Texas Department of Insurance – [“Vehicle Backing Safety Fact Sheet”](#)