

Occupations and Workplaces

Waste Collection Workers

On this page

[What does a waste collection worker do?](#)

[What are some health effects associated with waste collection?](#)

[What are some hazards associated with waste collection workers?](#)

[What are some preventative measures for waste collection workers?](#)

What does a waste collection worker do?

Waste collection involves the removal of items, usually from the roadside.

Waste collection is carried out close to vehicle traffic, at relatively high speeds, and involves jumping off and back onto trucks, and pulling, pushing, and lifting heavy, awkward, and overloaded weights in both hot and cold working conditions. These actions pose a significant risk, resulting in ergonomic and health issues. Irregular pavements, sidewalks, and long distances that must be covered daily can affect not only an individual's muscles but also ankles, knees, and shoulders, resulting in [musculoskeletal injuries](#).

What are some hazards associated with waste collection workers?

Waste collection workers work in varying conditions and are exposed to a variety of occupational hazards on a daily basis. Some of these hazards can include, but are not limited to:

Biological

- [Stinging insects](#)
- [Dermatitis or allergic contact](#)
- [Biological](#) substances, such as fungi, bacteria and other micro-organisms
- [Needlestick and sharp injuries](#)

- Dogs can attack workers
- Potential infection from bird or rodent droppings:
 - [Histoplasmosis](#)
 - [Psittacosis](#)
 - [Hantavirus](#)

Chemical

- [Chemical hazards](#), including [harmful levels of airborne contaminants](#), which can enter the body through different [routes of entry](#)
- Exposure to dust, harmful metals, and asbestos

Ergonomic

- [Manual handling](#)
- [Lifting](#) heavy or awkward objects
- Working in [awkward positions](#) or performing [awkward manual tasks](#) increases the risk of musculoskeletal injuries

Physical

- [Noise](#)
- Working in extreme [hot](#) and [cold](#) environments
- [Vibration](#)

Psychological

- [Stress](#), as a result of high job demands and possible low control over the situation
- [Fatigue](#)
- [Shift work](#) or [extended work days](#)

Safety

- [Backing up the vehicle](#)
- Objects falling out of overloaded containers
- Vehicular traffic and [exhaust](#) fume inhalation
- Jumping off and on the vehicle, running behind the vehicle, and holding on to the handle while the vehicle is moving
- Crushing injuries from moving parts

- Driving hazards, such as awareness of other vehicles, road conditions (including [winter driving](#)), and the location of on-foot waste collectors, etc.
 - Crushing and entanglement hazards when working near compactors and other moving or rotating equipment
 - [Slips, trips and falls](#), especially when working in wet environments
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What are some health effects associated with waste collection?

Health effects may include:

- Ergonomic injuries, including work-related musculoskeletal disorders and back injury
 - Cuts and bruises
 - Nausea and vomiting as a result of exposure to foul odour
 - Headaches, sunburn, [heat exhaustion](#), [and heat stroke](#) from working in a hot environment
 - Frostbite and hypothermia from working in a [cold environment](#)
 - [Noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus](#)
 - Hypertension, distress from [stress](#)
 - Tetanus – caused by a toxin produced by bacteria common in soil and sewage
 - Leptospirosis – caused by a parasitic worm
 - Injuries from biological materials leading to diseases such as [Hepatitis A, B or C](#)
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What are some preventative measures for waste collection workers?

Ensure that a [risk assessment](#) is conducted and the [hierarchy of controls](#) implemented, including Workplace Hazardous Material Information System ([WHMIS](#)) and other relevant training.

Since it is not possible to know the exact contents of all waste that may be collected, workers should treat all items as hazardous unless it is determined otherwise.

- Follow safe operating procedures for the [management of hazardous waste](#)
- Use the garbage truck's automated loading system for heavy loads, when available

- Test the weight of the object or waste item before lifting
- When [driving](#):
 - Conduct a pre-trip [vehicle inspection](#) before beginning the shift
 - Obey traffic rules and speed limits for the road, especially when collectors are near the vehicle
 - Use turn signals, hazard lights, cameras, sensors, and other safety or warning devices as needed
 - Wear seat belts
 - Do not use [cellular phones or other devices](#) while driving
 - Use proper [driver ergonomics](#) practices
 - Protect yourself from other vehicles by being cautious when stepping off and on the vehicle
- Use proper communication between the loader and the driver
- Always maintain eye contact with the driver when close to the vehicle and when the vehicle is backing up
- Do not wear personal headphones that block out surrounding noise
- Protect yourself from [sharp edges](#) or protruding parts by using safe lifting techniques and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment
- Refer to [Safety Data Sheets](#) (SDSs) for chemicals of concern, and follow precautions for all chemicals and materials, when possible
- Maintain up-to-date vaccine immunizations, e.g., tetanus and hepatitis
- Provide training to encourage [back injury prevention](#), avoid awkward body positions and repetitive manual tasks and to learn safe [lifting](#) techniques
- Promotion of [mental health](#) education and awareness in the work environment
- Promote [sanitation](#) and good hygiene practices, such as washing your hands before meals, drinking or smoking, to reduce the risk of infections and learn more about [handwashing](#) and the risk of infections
- Inspect and service [fire extinguishers](#) and [first aid kits](#) regularly and according to regulatory requirements, and post emergency phone numbers in the cab of the truck

- Train workers in the use, care, and wear of appropriate [personal protective equipment](#) (PPE), in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, including
 - [High visibility clothing](#)
 - [Care and maintenance](#) of approved [respirators](#), as necessary
 - Coveralls
 - Gloves
 - Wear appropriate [footwear](#) and watch for ice or surface conditions that increase the risk of slips or trips.
 - [Eye and Face Protectors](#)
 - Always:
 - Know how to report a [hazard](#)
 - Follow company safety rules
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