

Waste Truck Safety on the Road

Safety Starts with the Basics

Each day waste haulers and collectors get into the cab of their trucks as a routine, not realizing how dangerous their job is to themselves and others in the public. While any accident involving a waste truck is cause for concern, accidents where pedestrians or bicyclists are involved are especially disturbing. When a waste truck collides with another vehicle, the occupants are protected to a certain degree by the frame of the vehicle and airbags. Pedestrians and bicyclists are not as lucky since they are more vulnerable with no protection. Many times these accidents will involve children or elderly people, and are more likely to receive press coverage that can tarnish a waste company's public image.

Operators should be trained, competent and should arrive at the worksite prepared for a safe day by getting enough rest and taking occasional breaks during the day to reduce fatigue. Operators should wear approved personal protective equipment appropriate for the weather and work conditions.

A Dangerous New Trend

The most common reason for truck accidents is simply not paying attention. Drivers get into a routine while on their routes, they become too familiar and relaxed and "go through the motions" while on the job. It is every truck driver's responsibility to be alert and safety minded to avoid costly mishaps on the job. A common problem recently is that with cell phones so readily available, phone usage and 'texting' while driving has increased accident rates. It is more important than ever to educate drivers on how dangerous this is to themselves and others.

Backing is the Leading Cause of Accidents

Backing is the leading cause of motor vehicle accidents in the waste industry, and can be especially dangerous when visibility is hampered by darkness. Backing should be avoided as much as possible, but

when necessary, the driver must be acutely aware of their surroundings. Whereas stationary objects such as parked cars and poles are visible to the driver prior to backing, pedestrians and bicyclists can enter the work area and become a potential hazard. If available, operators should ask another worker to direct the backing from a safe and visible distance. Drivers should use every tool available such as mirrors, backup horns, cameras, and spotters to help minimize accidents.

Right Hand Turns

Waste trucks making right turns at intersections result in many accidents as well. Bicyclists that come up along the right side of the vehicle can get caught in the 'blind spot' and may not be visible in the operators mirror. Pedestrians often are not paying attention to traffic in crosswalks, and special attention by the driver is crucial when making any turns. Once again, paying attention at all times and knowing the situation and surroundings will make for a safe day for the driver and the public they serve.

There are many hazards for waste truck drivers today, and they need to be aware of these hazards and vigilant in safety. Periodic training in vehicular safety will help workers to keep moving in the right direction.

This article was contributed by Mike Burns of State Compensation Insurance Fund, CRRC's Workers Compensation insurance carrier and Associate Member of CRRC. Mike would be pleased to answer your questions or discuss this article further; you can contact him at (916) 263-7402.

Be sure to check the Safety Resources page of the CRRC website. CRRC believes that creating a culture of safety benefits all of our members and the communities they serve. This page and all of its content were created to fulfill that goal. If you have an article or resource that you'd like to share with your fellow members, please contact Trish Roath at trish@crrcnorth.org, or (916) 444-2772.