

WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY WHEN CONDUCTING WASTE ASSESSMENTS

Prepared by WCRA for the Bin Trim Business Grants Workshop

This fact sheet contains general information about work health and safety and is not intended as legal advice. It includes information about some of your obligations under the work health and safety legislation that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure that you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

The importance of WHS

Work health and safety (WHS) is about ensuring a safe workplace, including when visiting sites. For waste assessors and people in sales the workplace is mostly mobile (ie, the workplace moves from site-to-site throughout the working day). It is vital that you follow each site's procedures for managing workplace health and safety and any other procedures that ensure all work is done correctly and in a safe manner.

Model Health and Safety Legislation came into effect in NSW on 1st January 2012. Further details can be found on the WorkCover NSW website www.workcover.nsw.gov.au

Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU)

A PCBU must provide a safe working environment for all workers, customers and visitors, and ensure they are not exposed to health or safety risks at the work place. The PCBU is both the grant recipient and the business being assessed.

Assessors should undertake an on-site induction with the SME (PCBU) and, if required by the site, sign the visitors register. It is advisable that Assessors become familiar with the site before arriving by requesting and reviewing a site plan where possible. It may be your first time to the site and by receiving a proper induction and complying with the site's WHS procedures it will minimise the potential for adverse incidents.

Grant recipients are responsible for meeting all WHS requirements for the project and for meeting the WHS and other requirements of all SME sites. This should include the preparation of Safe Work Method Statements that are acceptable to the SMEs sites. Assessors (workers) should be consulted by the Grantee (PCBU) in the preparation of these risk assessments and safe work method statements. When conducting a Bin Trim assessment the assessor will need to refer to their WHS system for all WHS considerations including the preparation of risk assessments and safe work method statements.

Workers

Workers (assessors) have an obligation under work health and safety legislation to take reasonable care for their health & safety & for the health & safety of people who are at the same place of work and who may be affected by either their actions or inactions.

Workers must report hazards identified in the workplace and co-operate with their PCBU to ensure compliance with all WHS legislation, regulations and other standards.

Identifying hazardous tasks

The first step in managing risks from carrying out manual tasks is to identify those tasks that have the potential to cause a manual handling injury. These hazards arising from manual tasks generally involve interaction between a worker and:

- The work tasks and how they are performed e.g. inspecting waste bins
- The tools, equipment and objects handled, (eg., bin lids) and
- The physical work environment e.g. the site conditions, traffic, noise, odour, etc.

Managing Risk

Deciding what is 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm requires taking into account and weighing up all relevant matters including:

- the likelihood of the hazard or the risk concerned occurring
- the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or the risk
- knowledge about the hazard or risk, and ways of eliminating or minimising the risk
- the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk, and
- after assessing the extent of the risk and the available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, the cost associated with available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, including whether the cost is grossly disproportionate to the risk.

Common solutions used to counter hazards with manual handling are:

- Elimination – locate bins so that material is deposited directly into a bin rather than onto a floor or the ground
- Substitution – use of plant such as forklifts, pallet jacks, hydraulic lifts and bins with wheels
- Isolation – divert larger items directly to disposal point
- Engineering – use of a conveyor belt or bin lifter
- Administrative controls – training in team lifts or signage
- Personal Protective Equipment – wearing of a brace, gloves, safety boots, dust mask, high visibility vest, etc.

Hazardous & special wastes

Whilst it is illegal to dispose of hazardous or special waste in general waste containers, Workers should be aware that general waste containers may contain hazardous elements. These hazardous & special wastes may include, but not limited to a large range of chemicals, poisons, paint, oil and cleaners, fluorescent globes and tubes, gas bottles and fire extinguishers, batteries, cathode ray tubes and clinical waste and sharps. Therefore Workers should take the required care when undertaking waste inspections.

Other hazards

There are many other hazards that exist in waste and resource recovery activities. While some will be common to all sites, others will be site specific. As part of your WHS responsibilities you must identify those hazards present at your workplace (remember your workplace is mobile). Also note that new hazards may arise throughout the day and from day-to-day. Some of these other hazards include:

- radiation from the sun
- poorly maintained or exposed electrical wires and leads
- movement of vehicles
- slips, trips, falls from decks, platforms or due to build of materials or liquid leakages around the site, handling dead animals or being bitten by animals such as rats and birds that may be diseased from consuming waste
- contamination of hands, face and other exposed parts of the body with solids, liquids and gases from waste (e.g. exposure to Hepatitis B)
- stepping on rusty nails, tin or iron (exposure to Tetanus)
- moving plant parts or materials being processed
- hot parts of plant or equipment
- fire and explosion from gas, vapours or liquids when operating plant
- the handling of materials and vehicle movements can create breathing hazards from dust. Poor management of asbestos-containing wastes can result in exposure to asbestos fibres.

Emergency response and equipment

A PCBU must ensure that an emergency plan is prepared for the workplace. When an emergency occurs, ensure you follow the site's emergency response procedures for the specific emergency. Follow the instructions of the Emergency Coordinators. Evacuate to the designated emergency Assembly Point if you are ordered to do so.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

The PCBU who directs the carrying out of the work is required to take all practicable measures to ensure the health and safety of people in their workplace. Sometimes fulfilling this obligation requires the supply of appropriate, well maintained personal protective equipment (PPE) including information, instruction and training on its proper use. PPE is defined as any clothing, equipment or substance designed to be worn by a person to protect the person from the risks of injury or illness.

It is well recognised that PPE is the last hazard control measure to be used. This is because PPE does not change the hazard itself but rather puts a barrier between you and the hazard. PPE should be used in conjunction with other control measures to increase the level of protection from the hazard.

Workers have a duty of care under WHS law when it comes to PPE. A Worker must co-operate with their PCBU by wearing or using appropriate PPE (in accordance with reasonable instructions). It is essential that you also wear required PPE correctly. Instructions can be in the form of designated signs such as 'Hearing protection required in this area' or a safe working procedure may stipulate requirements such as wearing safety goggles or high visibility clothing when working outside.

Some types of PPE commonly used in the waste and resource recovery industry include hard hats, gloves, high visibility clothing, safety goggles, safety harness for working at heights, sunscreen, ear plugs; and wet weather gear.

Assessors (via their PCBU) should ensure that all relevant PPE is determined and available via a properly completed risk assessment.