



## **COVID-19 and waste management activities guidance consultation**

**This submission is made by Unite, Britain and Ireland's largest union with over 1.3 million members across all sectors of the economy including manufacturing, financial services, transport, food and agriculture, construction, energy and utilities, information technology, service industries, health, local government and the not for profit sector. Unite also organises in the community, enabling those who are not in employment to be part of our union.**

- i. Unite has 80,000 members working in local authorities and outsourced local authority services including within waste, recycling and refuse services.
- ii. Unite welcomes the chance to feed into the Waste Industry Safety and Health (WISH) Consultation on the development of COVID 19 guidance and good practice.
- iii. Unite members working in refuse and waste sector recognise they are essential workers and want to play their part in this time of national crisis, however it is vital that those workers are engaged through safe working methods in the exercise of their duties.
- iv. Unite has come across some examples of good practice around the country but also many examples of employer negligence, incompetence and disregard for our members' safety.
- v. Through discussion with members, working both in councils and outsourced employers, Unite has developed the following minimum standards for all refuse workers on social distancing and protectives arrangements (see below). We believe that these should also be the basis for the WISH guidance.
- vi. Unite would be willing to have further discussions with the WISH on any issues surrounding this issue as it is imperative that our members are not put at unacceptable levels of risk while providing vital services to our communities.

### **Unite minimum standards for refuse workers during the COVID 19 crisis**

#### **1) Driver only in Cab**

Government guidance states that workers should be 2 metres apart to avoid unnecessary contact. This is simply not possible inside vehicles, yet some employers are insisting on multiple workers sitting in cabs. This is unacceptable.

Unite is demanding that only the driver should be in the wagon and that specific wagons must be designated to specific individuals to avoid using different vehicles each day.

Other workers must be on foot alongside the wagon whilst maintaining social distancing.

**2) All other crew members to be transported to route separately**

At commencement of duty there is no need for refuse workers to gather at a central depot location to conduct their rounds. If workers require to pick up PPE, collection times from the depot should be staggered and then workers must be transported in separate vehicles to the start of the run.

Employers must therefore agree that:

- a) Only the driver needs to attend the depot to pick up their wagon with other workers picking up PPE at staggered times.
- b) Rounds must be organised by setting designated meeting point/ address for workers to start from.
- c) There must be arrangements for workers to use their own vehicles to attend the round, including lifting parking restrictions, allowances paid for mileage and the option to utilise taxis rather than public transport.

**3) Wagons must be deep cleaned daily**

To minimise potential contact wagons should also be deep cleaned daily using appropriate standards to cleanse the COVID 19 virus.

**4) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be available and in date**

All workers must have access to appropriate Masks, Gloves, Eyewear and Sanitiser in order to conduct their rounds.

This equipment must be well maintained in date and staff must be trained properly how to use and store it. Face mask's used as PPE/RPE must be at least FFP3 standard and face fitted.

**5) Arrangements for comfort breaks**

There must be additional facilities made available to them for comfort breaks.

Such facilities need to have the same high levels of social distancing and cleanliness as other areas these workers are expected to work.

Facilities need to have provision for washing hands or strict provision of sanitiser

**6) Washing and changing facilities**

Facilities must be in place to allow workers to wash and change out of work clothes before travelling home. These facilities must meet the same high levels of social distancing and cleanliness as other areas these workers are expected to work.

As a minimum:

- a) Introduce staggered start and finish times to reduce congestion, 2 metre rule.
- b) Enhanced cleaning of all facilities throughout the day and at the end of each day.
- c) Based on the size of each facility, determine how many people can use it at any one time to maintain a distance of 2 metres.
- d) Provide suitable and sufficient rubbish bins in these areas with regular removal and disposal.
- e) Extra soap, sanitiser will need to be ordered and made available due to enhanced hygiene.

## **7) Facilities for PPE**

PPE must also be stored, cleaned and disposed of safely. This must include:

- a) PPE needs to be stored in the workplace in individual lockers.
- b) Re-usable PPE to be thoroughly cleaned after use and not shared between workers
- c) Single use PPE should be disposed of so that it cannot be reused

## **8) Workers right to leave work on health and safety grounds**

If employees reasonably believe they are in serious and imminent danger, under the Employment Rights Act 1996 section 44 they can leave the place of danger and not return if the danger persists.

The current risk of infection is set at high by the UK Gov in line with advice from the chief medical officers. There is currently in place stringent criteria from the same authorities on social distancing and hygiene controls.

It is therefore important to follow the advice in this guide.

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