

2016 Safety Award entry - Biggest Safety Improvement

Athens-Clarke County Solid Waste Department

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Title of entry: Working Smarter, Working Safer

Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

Population 124,000

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Keeping employees safe does not involve a single action item. Improving worker safety takes an active mind and mindset – the desire to keep staff safe must be wide-ranging and relentless. Athens-Clarke County Solid Waste Department has taken significant steps to improve safety, and some of them have had big price tags. But perhaps more importantly, we've taken an inclusive, steady approach to proactively reduce injuries. Incremental improvements are not only easier on the budget, but they have been more readily accepted by the crews. Hi-Visibility uniforms improve morale, regular training sessions maintain awareness and disciplinary action for safety violation reinforces our intent – all these approaches have all been phased in, making it easier to budget and plan for the next improvements. Next step - the next boot truck will have only safety-toed shoes.

Describe your safety program, including your use of Safety Monday and other safety information provided by SWANA.

Gear and awareness have been paramount in our approach to improving worker safety. We recently upgraded our collection fleet to mostly use fully automated trucks. This keeps the crews in the cab and off the street pushing roll carts. The trucks are equipped with Telma braking systems to improve driver and citizen safety, and high-visibility lighting systems that far exceed DOT requirements. Leaf and Limb crews work from enclosed cabs, reducing external hazards while improving operator comfort. Daily inspections and sign-off sheets ensure the trucks are in safe operating condition.

Safety Monday bulletins from SWANA are posted in the crew area by the time clock. Monthly safety meeting topics have included:

- Proper stretching (presented by one of the crew members) (photo)
- Hydration and risk of heat-related illness
- Sharps disposal and exposure treatment
- Proper Lifting (presented by one of the crew members) (photo)
- Landfill safety
- Active shooter training
- MRF safety
- Animal safety (including live snakes – for the leaf and limb crews!)

We believe in planning and prevention, and are constantly looking for opportunities to improve safety and lower risk. After two front-load collection vehicle fires, all front-loaders were fitted with fire suppression systems. Additionally, inexpensive modifications to collection supervisor F-150s provide meatier fire response than the traditional 'quick get the fire extinguisher' approach. A little creative cutting and welding allows dual 35-pound extinguishers to be securely mounted, out of view but quickly accessible.

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How do you measure results for your safety program? Examples include, but are not limited to: the frequency of accidents or injuries, workers compensation claims, amount paid for claims, reduction in hazards.

ACC Solid Waste counts the number of worker's compensation insurance claims. These claims are analyzed by frequency and type (see Figure 1.)

What results did you use as a baseline for comparison to determine improvement between 2014 and 2015? (This may be either a calendar or fiscal year)

From 2014-2015, accidents resulting in worker's compensation claims dropped from nine to six. (See Figure 1) The numbers are so low that drawing meaningful conclusions in any single category is difficult. Back and extremity injuries have always claimed the most injuries; from 2014-2015 back injuries dropped from 2 to 1. Hand injuries fell from 3 to one, while foot and head injuries dropped from one to zero. Other categories climbed from zero to one, but again, at these low levels there is little to be learned from this data.

Taking a longer view provides us with data to support ongoing safety improvements. Over the last 11 years, injuries have fallen steadily from 19 in 2005 to six in 2015. Looking at five-year increments is equally powerful. From 2005 to 2009, 26 injuries were logged. In the last 5 years, there have been five. (See Figure 2)

How did you measure the safety improvement that you achieved in 2015? (Quantify reduction in 1 or more metrics identified in question 3).

So far in calendar year 2016, we've had one – a driver inexplicably strained his thumb on the joystick lever of an automated truck.

To what do you attribute the improvement in your safety performance in 2015?

The most obvious contributor is the most expensive – the switch to automated collection has reduced staff size and consequently exposure to risk, and reduced hazards to remaining employees by keeping them inside the truck.

However, our data shows a steady decline in injuries that began long before the introduction of automated collection. It is impossible to know what preventative measures have worked, and there have been many improvements affecting 'the little things' that can make a difference. Chief among these has been the conscious effort to steadily expand a culture of safety in our department, one that has improved employee

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morale. Since 2005, clothing has improved from whatever the guys wanted to wear to having Hi-Viz outerwear, boots and gloves provided for them. This has instilled a sense of pride, and we've found that they're generally kept in better condition. Trucks are equipped with safety lighting systems exceeding DOT requirements and improved operator comfort.



Clothing improvements over the last few decades



Why do you think your safety program deserves this improvement award?

Our achievements have been the result of a steady, measured approach that can serve as a model to other organizations, with little sticker shock. Most of our crew members have embraced our emphasis on safety, and seem to believe our concern for them is genuine and not simply motivated by lowering insurance rates. Some of the safety improvements have also improved staff comfort as well, which is always good for morale. For example, there is not a big cost involved in cold-weather Hi-Visibility gear,



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	# of Claims per Year												Total by Injury Type
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Back	9	3	3	6	5	3	1	0	2	2	1		35
Ankle	3	6	3	1	3	2	4	1					23
Hand			2			3	2	1	1	3	1		13
Foot		2	2	1			1	2	1	1			10
Dog Bite	1	3		2				1		1			8
Arm			2	2	1	1		1					7
Knee	6										1		7
Eyes				1		1		1			1		4
Head					2				1	1			4
Groin			1			1		1		1			4
Neck				1					1				2
Face			1								1		2
Bee Sting					1				1				2
Thumb											1	1	2
Leg		2											2
Elbow							1						1
Needle Stick									1				1
Wrist		1											1
Total for the Year	19	17	14	14	12	11	9	8	8	9	6	1	128

Figure 2