2016 Safety Award Entry

Category: Biggest Safety Improvement

Organization: Public Works, Department of Waste Management
City of Norfolk, Virginia

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Entry Title: City of Norfolk, Virginia Waste Management Division
Come to work on time, do your job safely and efficiently, and go home.

Jurisdiction: City of Norfolk, Virginia
Jurisdiction Population: 242,000
Come to work on time, do your job safely and efficiently, and go home.

Executive Summary

The City of Norfolk, Virginia is proud to present our story of our “Biggest Safety Improvement”. In February 2011, our organization suffered a failure of organizational leadership regarding safety and operations which led to the death of a worker. Accident and injury rates were at all time highs. Morale was low. Regulatory agencies had painted the Waste Management Division not only as unsafe, but not in compliance with state and federal law regarding many of its operations. Safety was not in the “culture” of the organization. Today, after a few years of commitment, everything we do at the Waste Management Division begins and ends with safety. The division’s biggest safety improvement was the removal of riding steps from the collection vehicles. We ask three things of our workers every day: come to work on time, do your job safely and efficiently, and go home.

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

Our belief is that all aspects of the Waste Management program of administration and collections begin and end with safety. Reduced accidents resulted in monetary savings. Training is ongoing and comprehensive to cover many safety issues. Emphasis is given to the safe operation of refuse trucks and minimizing the risks and hazards of the operation. An hour training period was established for the first Tuesday of each month. Topics covered include: Human Resources training, hazards associated with both hot and cold weather, OSHA requirements (blood borne pathogens, PPE, CPR), and any current health or environmental concerns (i.e., Ebola and the Zika viruses). One Tuesday each quarter the training period will be extended for an additional hour to hold refresher training to include the safe operation of each type of collection vehicle, cleaning behind the packing blades, removing a container when it falls inside the hopper, or forklift operations. Additionally, the quarterly training periods will include lessons learned from the previous quarter’s Accident Review Board Hearings.
We also subscribe to SWANA’s Technical Divisions of Planning and Management, and Collections and Transfer.

Safety Monday is received by the Superintendent of Waste Management and forwarded to 61 email addresses within Waste Management and Public Works. Our Safety Specialist shares each Safety Monday on Tuesday morning as this is the beginning of our work week for the majority of our force. Using as many partners as we can find, i.e. NWRA, we share news stories on accidents, injuries and deaths throughout the industry as a constant “lessons learned” reminder.

The “Slow Down to Get Around” campaign was fully embraced in Norfolk in 2012 with the introduction of newly designed fully automated equipment. These stickers were placed on the back of our trucks and over the next 3 years have progressively been displayed bigger and bolder.
In July 2015 Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe took part in a ceremonial signing of House Bill 1649 that enhances safety for workers in the waste and recycling industry. This new law went into effect on July 1, 2015. House bill 1649, also known as “Slow Down to Get Around” requires drivers to change lanes if possible or slow down to at least ten (10) miles per hour below the posted speed limit and pass at least two feet to the left of the stationary vehicles that are in the process of collecting trash or recycling. The new law carries a penalty of up to $250.

We participated in the SWANA safety stand down this year and placed the SWANA-provided stickers on all support equipment. The vehicles can be seen in areas around town on non-collection days as supervisors and inspectors investigate neighborhood concerns and as refuse containers are delivered, exchanged or repaired by city staff. These stickers alert followers to anticipate uncommon driving patterns.

McAuliffe during signing of House bill 1649 “Slow Down to Get Around”.

Container delivery and repair.

Support Equipment.
For ten years, the Public Works Department has been offering Norfolk residents the opportunity to develop skills for the pursuing a career in the field of Waste Management.

During this program, apprentices are given the opportunity to train on city vehicles in preparation for obtaining their Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) as well as use a computer to take practice exams for the CDL on the DMV website. Safety training is integrated with FEMA’s Incident Command System (ICS).

Apprentices also attend safety training forums to learn other job skills applicable for employment in Public Works. Upon completion of the six-month program, apprentice program graduates are eligible to be hired for refuse collector positions through the city’s regular recruitment process. To date, thirty-three residents have participated in the program and started careers with the Division of Waste Management.

This program is now being used in other divisions within Public Works. Other City departments are looking to add Apprenticeship programs as well.
How do you measure results for your safety program?

Norfolk Waste Management measures results of accidents and injuries by keeping detailed safety records (used to submit the OSHA 300 report). In addition, Waste Management conducts a monthly Accident Review Board which was established to review all accidents and recommend appropriate training. Disciplinary actions are not part of the review process.

Reviewing workers’ compensation claims and amounts paid annually are tracked by the loss prevention section of the City’s Finance Department.

We use job safety analyses that are included in our civil service job descriptions which identify the hazards of the job and then identify ways to reduce the hazards. For example, removal of riding steps on rear loaders.

Staff Writer for the Portland Press Herald Ray Routhier, right, rides a garbage truck Thursday with Nick Albano, a Portland trash collector.

Employees riding on rear loader steps.

Norfolk City Incident Reporting Forms are completed for every vehicular incident.

VA Workers’ Compensation Forms are completed for every injury.
What results did you use as a baseline for comparison to determine improvement between 2014 and 2015?

The baseline for comparison to determine improvement between 2014 and 2015 was the number of back injuries incurred by Refuse Collectors. Occupational and Non-Occupational injuries are tracked monthly by the division. Trends in incidents are evaluated on a monthly basis and annual training is adjusted to address any developing trends. We reviewed many injury reports for our workforce and found that a direct correlation between back injuries and the repetitive motion of stepping on and off the rear loader steps.

How did you measure the safety improvement that you achieved in 2015?

In 2014 the Division recorded 14 back injuries out of a total of 45 claims reported to Sedgwick, the city’s workers’ compensation provider. Following the removal of the rear loader steps in 2015 the Division recorded 6 back injuries for a 57% reduction. Overall claims were reduced by 13%.
To what do you attribute the improvement in your safety performance in 2015?

Part IV: Section D, of the Manual of Recommended Safety Practices by Environmental Industry Associations states the following: Do not use riding steps when the vehicle is exceeding 10 miles per hour or operating in reverse or when distance travel exceeds 2/10 of mile. Do not mount or dismount step when vehicle is in motion. Ride facing the side of vehicle. We experienced numerous accidents resulting from failure of our workers to follow this standard. Because of the nature of the business, we found that it was impossible to effectively enforce. The removal of riding steps from our rear loaders clearly sent the message that we are not going to get someone hurt when we have the ability to remove the hazard. When we are occasionally questioned about the steps, by some of our refuse collectors, we can provide all too common examples found in the media of a worker being backed over or crushed as a result of using riding steps.

Garbage truck travails
Safety concerns persist over workers riding on backs of garbage trucks. One worker was killed in May after being hit by passing semi-trailer.

Safety Culture firmly in place: Rear loader with steps removed.

Safety Culture firmly in place: Hazard recognition and mitigation.

Dominion Power High Voltage Training.

Online article by Diane Rodgers.
Training and Inspections are conducted as listed below.

Initial Training and Policy and Procedure Requirements
Annual Training Requirements, Certifications, Inspections
Weekly Training
Monthly facility inspection
Quarterly Visual Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) Inspection Report
Monthly vehicle inspection
Weekly random vehicle inspection

1 Initial Training Requirements

- Blood Pathogens (Infectious Disease and Health Hazard) – Hepatitis Declination Form
- Confined Spaces Entry / Permit
- De-Energizing-Lockout Program
- Electrical Safety in the work place / Overhead Power Lines/Power Tools
- Ergonomics
- Fall Protection / Slip, Trip and Fall Training
- Field Safety Tips
- Fire Safety / Emergency Preparedness
- Fork Lift Safety
  - Accident and Incident Prevention and Reporting Job Inquiries
  - Hazardous Communication and MSDS Policy’s
  - Effects of Weather (Excessive Heat and Extreme Cold weather training)
  - General House Keeping / Office Safety
- Proper Lifting and Back Safety
- Personal Protective Equipment: PPE
- Drivers Road Test
- Proper Backing and Hand Signals
- Loading and Unloading Refuse Truck / Cleaning Behind the Blade
- Operating Manuals Reading / Understanding (Operating Instructions should be followed exactly)
- Equipment Training (Workers should only use equipment for which they’ve been trained and authorized to use)
- Pre and Post Trips Forms
- Spill Response
- Vehicle Accidents
- On the Road Hazards – Job Hazards
- Work Zone Training
- Initial Policy and Procedure Training
- Cell Phone Policy (SOP 826)
- Safety Shoe Policy
- Seatbelt Policy
- Driver license Policy

Driving Restrictions
- Idling Policy
- Alpha Designation / Inclement Weather Policy
- Employee’s Policies and Procedures (SOP 902)
- Secondary Employment
- Electronic Mail and Information System Use Policy
- Phone Procedures
- Gas Card Policy
- Road Assistance Procedures (SOP 816)
- Vehicle Maintenance and Reporting Procedures (SOP 819)
- Two Way Radio Policy (SOP 817)
  - Damaged Utility Equipment (SOP 821)
  - Exemption Program (SOP 827)
  - Refuse Collector Duties and Responsibilities (SOP 834)
  - Group Task Policy
2 Annual Training

CPR / First Aid / AED Training
- Blood Borne Pathogens
- Confine Space Entry
- Fire Emergency
- Office Ergonomics
- Hazard Communication
- Hazard Sources: Lockout / Tag out
- Emergency Preparedness
- Work Zone / Flagging
- Back Safety
- Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)
- Slip, Trip and Fall protection
- Respirator Training (For Required Employees)
- HazWoper Training (For Required Employees)
- Job Hazards / On the Road Safety / Work Standards and Safety / Dog Safety
- Rear Loader Safety / Proper Backing / Hand Signals / Spill Training
- Inclement Weather (cold – h)
- Removing Containers From Hopper
- (SOP 834) Drivers Responsibilities / Pre and Post Trip
- Walk Around Equipment Understand all Warning and Caution Stickers
- Fork Lift Training (For Required Employees)
- Rear Loader, Side Loader, Boom and Automated Operation and Safety open-forum
- Job ergonomics / Proper Lifting
- Overhead power lines / Loading and unloading Trucks

2A. Annual Certifications

- Light Rail Training (Track Access)
- Driver’s Road Test
- Fork Lift
- Respirator
- HazWoper Refresh / Hazmat Physical
- Work Zone (Bi Annual)
- CPR / First Aid (Bi Annual)
- Chemical Response Training

2B. Annual Inspection

- SWPPP – due January
- Hoist Inspection
- Fire Extinguisher Inspection
- HHW Storage Facility Fire Suppression System Inspection
- Air Compressor Tank Inspection

3 Monthly Training

- Annual requirements throughout the year.

4 Monthly Facility Inspection

- Loss Control Audit – Last Monday of each month
- SWPPP Report – Last Monday of each month

5 Quarterly Inspection

- Quarterly Visual SWPPP Report

6 Monthly Vehicle Inspection

- 1st Monday of each Month

7 Weekly Random Vehicle Inspections

Waste Management strongly believe that the above items are not just checklist items. Complying with the directives above make us the professional organization we are. We hold ourselves accountable.
Section 6: Why do you think your safety program deserves this improvement award?

In February 2011 a City of Norfolk Waste Management Division worker was killed while inside an energized hopper of an automated truck. In addition to dealing with the OSHA investigation that followed the death of this worker, the Division spiraled into a chaotic situation with generally poor employee morale, many service complaints by citizens, an old fleet, and spotty safety training at best. A total transformation of the operation became one the City’s highest priorities.

In the world of safety, it is thought that unsafe situations can be made safe by mitigating the hazard. Riding on the back of a rear loader cannot be done safely. The reason is clear; not all workers will follow the safety rules that have been established by the industry. The removal of rear loader steps eliminates any possibility of a worker being injured or killed because of them. To our knowledge, we are one of the first municipalities in the country to willingly abate this hazard.

New equipment was introduced to better protect the worker. Instead of many different cab designs, we specified one in order to standardize the training. Instead of a driver being in a different truck daily, we assigned one truck to one driver to establish ownership and pride.

Before trucks are sent to the City’s Fleet Management for repair or service, trucks are jointly inspected by the driver and one of Waste Management’s mechanics. This process has greatly improved the downtime at Fleet as Fleet mechanics do not have to hunt for issues.

Our supervisors and workers had to embrace the new safety culture. New employees learned immediately that we have a very high safety standard at Waste Management.

We believe that our safety program deserves this improvement award because our Waste Management team has completed the total transformation of our operation to an operation based on a culture of safety. This was done in less than four years. Most recently, we identified a serious safety hazard in our industry (riding steps) and took on a leadership role in eliminating it from our operations.