



RECRUITING PERSONNEL FOR SOLID WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES



It has been recently reported that the shortage of over-the-road (OTR) truck drivers in the U.S. is at the highest level it has been in 15 years due to a surging freight economy and lack of qualified drivers. The driver shortage in the OTR trucking industry is also being experienced in the waste/recyclables collection industry.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of refuse and recyclable material collectors is projected to grow eight percent from 2018 to 2028, faster than the average for all occupations. Trash collection activity should be expected to increase as the population grows, and collectors will be needed to remove trash. A tightening labor market with more job openings than potential qualified employees will only exacerbate the situation as demand for these positions grows.

The driver shortage issue in the waste collection industry mirrors the shortage in OTR truck drivers and is caused by many of same factors, including:

- Competing demands for trucking services due to industry growth
- Aging workforce
- Low wages
- Low industry participation by females
- Tightening of eligibility requirements

The SWANA Applied Research Foundation's (ARF) Collection Group identified the need for research on innovations in recruiting personnel for solid waste collection services, which is the focus of this report. According to the city of Tucson, which submitted the topic,

“A study is needed on today’s operators—past, current, and future. It seems like we are having a harder time getting young operators wanting to get into the industry. Just a quick study we did in Tucson recognized that our average age of driver being hired is 36 years old.”

Several different organizations have developed programs and legislation to address the waste/recyclables collection driver shortage issue which are described in the report.

One particular issue identified during the project and addressed in the report is the low participation of women in the waste collection industry. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that almost 47 percent of U.S. workers are women, which equates to a total of 74.6 million women in the workforce. With respect to waste/recyclables collection, it is estimated that about 1,200 women are employed in this line of work, which equates to about one percent of the 116,000 sanitation workers in the U.S. These data indicate the tremendous potential that exists for addressing the waste/recycling collection driver shortage through the recruitment and retention of female drivers.

The Phoenix Public Works Department's Solid Waste Division is an enterprise fund that provides residential collection and disposal of trash and recyclables for more than 400,000 households in the city. In Phoenix and elsewhere, the term “garbage man” has been widely used due to the male-dominated nature of the industry. Because women are a vital component of a successful workplace, Phoenix is committed to creating the awareness and outreach necessary to engage and recruit women into the profession.

To attract more drivers, the waste industry needs to emphasize its inherent advantages from a truck driver's perspective: namely no time away from home, regular work hours, and the universal and permanent need for waste collection services and drivers. The growing utilization of automated collection vehicles makes waste and recyclables collection a less physically demanding job. The industry also needs to continue to do more to address a major concern, namely the relatively high fatality and illness/injury risks associated with the industry.

As concluded in the report, there is an opportunity for SWANA to play a national role in the recruitment, promotion, and utilization of women in this industry.