



# HAZARD ALERT

## Garbage Trucks



**An Oregon employer experienced the death of a garbage truck driver who was crushed by the compactor blade of his truck. Following a two-month investigation, Oregon OSHA cited the employer for safety violations that contributed to the fatality.**



The 61-year-old driver was finishing a route that he had worked for more than 19 years when he apparently climbed into the back of the truck to clear debris that had jammed behind the trash compacting blade. Other employees said it was common for drivers to clear debris from behind their blades twice a day or more. On the day of the accident, the victim was driving a

“float vehicle,” which employees drive when their regular truck is being serviced. After the accident, the truck was inspected and inspectors found the safety interlock on the access door of the truck was broken – stuck in a closed position – and would not interrupt the electrical power as it is designed to do.

The company safety policy requires drivers to turn off the truck’s engine and pocket the keys before entering the area behind the compacting blade, but this employee failed to do that. Inspectors from Oregon OSHA said the employer failed to develop an energy control program, ensuring that before any employee performs servicing or maintenance,

the equipment is isolated from the source and rendered inoperative. State documents also show the company had not trained drivers or maintenance personnel hired since the original training 16 years ago on the lockout/tagout procedures. The procedures had not been inspected in more than 14 years, investigators said. Oregon OSHA cited the employer for not including training as a part of the program that covers the service and maintenance operation of the mobile compaction equipment that killed the employee. The company has since paid the fines and implemented new procedures and training programs.

Preventing fatalities, accidents, and injuries involving employees and garbage trucks is a tough job given the difficult working conditions of solid waste collection. The good news is that workplace safety in the solid waste industry is improving. According to a recent report by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the number of fatalities by solid waste collection workers declined substantially in 2007. BLS’s data states that there were 18 reported “Refuse and Recyclable Material Collectors” workplace fatalities in 2007. In 2006, BLS reported 37 fatalities for this category. The fatality rate for collectors declined in 2007 from 40.7 to 22.8 per 100,000 workers. Despite the decline in workplace fatalities, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics listed refuse collectors among the nation’s most dangerous occupations in 2007.

Oregon  
**OSHA**

Oregon OSHA  
[www.orosha.org](http://www.orosha.org)  
800-922-2689

DEPARTMENT OF  
CONSUMER  
& BUSINESS  
SERVICES

Hazard alerts provide information on hazardous materials, equipment, or practices. For more information contact the Oregon OSHA Standard and Technical Resources Section at 503-378-3272, toll-free at 800-922-2689, or visit our website at [www.orosha.org](http://www.orosha.org).

### Lockout/Tagout (LOTO)

An important and frequent hazard in the industry involves workers' failure to perform proper lockout/tagout procedures during maintenance and cleaning. Lockout/tagout (LOTO) refers to specific practices and procedures to safeguard employees from machinery and equipment unexpectedly starting or releasing hazardous energy while being serviced. You must develop an energy control program that protects employees from the release of hazardous energy and requires lockout/tagout procedures to protect drivers who enter the trash compactors to clear refuse from behind the hydraulic ram blade. If drivers are cleaning or dislodging garbage from the blade or servicing the truck, they must be following a lockout/tagout procedure that requires the equipment to be disconnected from its power source.

Approximately 3 million workers service equipment and face the greatest risk of injury if lockout/tagout is not properly implemented. Compliance with the control of hazardous energy standard [1910.147](#) prevents an estimated 120 fatalities and 50,000 injuries each year. Workers injured on the job from exposure to hazardous energy lose an average of 24 workdays for recuperation. In a study conducted by the United Auto Workers (UAW), 20 percent of the fatalities (83 of 414) that occurred among their members between 1973 and 1995 were attributed to inadequate hazardous energy control procedures, specifically lockout/tagout procedures.

### Confined Spaces

[OAR 437-002-0146](#)

The body of the truck is considered a confined space and drivers should be aware of the hazards and procedures associated with them. Garbage truck drivers must use the access door, often located behind the cab, to clear debris. A confined space is large enough to enter, has limited ways to enter or exit, and it is not designed for continuous occupancy. In addition to garbage trucks, confined spaces include, but are not limited to, underground vaults, tanks, storage bins, manholes, pits, silos, process vessels, and pipelines.

### Additional Safety Guidelines

**Training** - Follow an annual training inspection schedule where you review your company safety procedures and have all employees sign off on them each year. Training is just as important for the long-time employee as the new employee – old habits can kill.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** – Make sure your drivers wear the proper PPE, such as high-visibility outerwear when exposed to roadway traffic hazards and eye protection when using chemicals to wash trucks. Trucks should be equipped with hard hats that fit the driver in case drivers enter a hard hat area.

**Emptying loads in transfer stations** – Make sure drivers use backup alarms or spotters when backing up. Drivers must know how to dislodge a stuck load using cylinder locks and an extension pole.

**Loading** – Teach your employees to work smart, avoiding strains and sprains. Make sure they use a three-point entry and exit, especially in rainy weather and slippery conditions. They should reload the tote or container and have the truck do the lifting rather than throwing the material into the hopper.

**Cell phones and radio calls** – Develop a policy to ensure that hands-free calls are the only calls allowed while the truck is moving.

**Accidents and incident reporting** – Require employees to report all accidents and incidents. Many small events preclude big events.

**Ergonomics** – Teach your drivers the importance of sitting squarely in the seat and keeping their elbows close to the body whenever possible. Teach them to avoid strain to the hips and lower back by not double footing the controls.

