



## Workers exposed to chemical fumes during household waste collection

### Background

A local government organisation held a waste collection day in early 2016, for residents to drop off items such as white goods, E-waste, vehicle batteries, engine oil, tyres and paint. Four workers clearing the paints after the collection day noticed a chemical odour, and became unwell almost immediately. Symptoms included vomiting, watering eyes, tingling lips and dizziness. Workers were driven to a medical centre and another worker who was driving those affected became ill from secondary exposure. Workers were transferred to hospital for observation and released later the same day.

### Contributing factors

- No risk assessment for chemical hazards associated with the waste collection day
- No formal safe work procedures in relation to chemical hazards associated with the waste collection day
- No MSDS used to identify hazards and controls for anticipated chemical wastes
- No provision of respirators appropriate for chemical vapours
- No information or training to workers in relation to potential chemical hazards and how to manage incidents relating to chemicals
- Resident/s may have dropped off unsuitable or incorrectly labelled hazardous chemicals.

### Action required

1. Educate residents on waste acceptance criteria.
2. Verbally confirm the nature of the wastes with residents during the waste drop-off.
3. Visually check that chemical containers are intact, closed and labelled during the waste drop-off.
4. Ensure information is available on chemical hazards. For example, use typical MSDSs for common wastes such as oil based paints, thinners and vehicle batteries as a guide.
5. Conduct risk assessments for waste collection days.
6. Ensure appropriate safety equipment (including PPE) is available for routine collection activities and for potential incidents such as a spill, fire or chemical exposure.
7. Ensure workers conducting waste collection activities have been trained in potential hazards, suitable control measures, use of PPE, and how to deal with unplanned incidents.

### Further information

Department of Environment Regulation, 2013. Guidelines for the design and operation of facilities for the acceptance and storage of household hazardous waste. Available at [www.der.wa.gov.au](http://www.der.wa.gov.au)

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's website or by contacting customer services on 1300 307 877 or e-mail [safety@commerce.wa.gov.au](mailto:safety@commerce.wa.gov.au)

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