

Training for safety

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Andy Firman, managing director of AJF Waste Management discusses how a thorough staff training programme can improve health and safety.

To say that I was disappointed at the recent revelation on HSE accident reporting in the waste industry is a severe understatement.



Andy Firman, managing director, AJF Waste Management

Nine deaths in just 12 weeks over the summer was tragic enough, but at least we were able to take small comfort in the fact that overall injury levels had dipped. Now we learn that, instead, major injuries and those lasting over three days have, in fact, increased as well.

I'm sure no one would disagree that even one fatality is too many; we also need to remember that figures rise and fall and the recent spate of accidents is not representative of broader annual figures. However, for the individuals and families affected, statistics are irrelevant; as an industry, we need to bear this in mind and plan for how best to protect employees from unnecessary risk.

Since AJF Waste Management launched in 2007, more than 3,000 operatives around the UK have sat our courses in safe working practices and manual handling. We have witnessed a huge surge in interest, with one third – 1,000 – of trainees coming to us in the last year. Hopefully, this demonstrates that awareness is increasing and the safeguarding of staff has become more of a priority for many local authorities and waste management firms.

Risks

However, these figures are still just a drop in the ocean. Waste management sites are populated with dangerous moving equipment, and the risks are equally high for staff on collection rounds who negotiate a daily obstacle course of narrow streets, moving vehicles and members of the public unaware of potential hazards.

Following the spate of fatal accidents over the summer, the HSE called for businesses to ensure that staff were “properly trained and supervised”. I would argue that “proper training” is such that it relates in a practical way to the day-to-day activities of the member of staff, and is accredited by a recognised industry body. AJF Waste Management training, for example, carries the mark of Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH).

For those looking to contract a trainer, accreditation should be a priority. According to Rachel Carroll, waste team leader at Cheshire East council, training needs to be “as top notch as possible; accredited training courses have full support, that definitely carries a lot of weight.”

Cheshire East Council has adopted the AJF Waste Management franchised opportunity and now provides industry-accredited training to all of their waste and recycling operatives. Rachel has been through training herself and is one of two members of staff who took on the ‘Train the Trainer’ scheme to deliver courses in-house to employees and agency staff. In total, Cheshire East Council has provided training for 181 Waste and Recycling staff and recognises the importance in investing in agency staff as well as full time employees.

Practices

She said: “We provide training in safe working practices, which includes street collections and reversing assistant training. Agency staff are required to do the job – be that a driver or a loader – so they need to know the potential dangers and risks out there, not just to themselves but to their team and members of the public as well. We are a public service and as such we need to have the training in place to make sure that we can reduce the risk of any incident as practicably possible.”

Any employer which makes a commitment to staff, and especially those that include the often invisible army of agency workers that provide the backbone to our industry, deserve commendation. What’s missing is a requirement to others to show duty of care, slash injury figures and build a truly modern, equipped workforce for the twenty-first century.