

ESA Policy Briefing

ESA's focus on health and safety performance in the waste and resource management industry

Statistics published today (01 November 2017) by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) on the waste and recycling industry's performance once again point to a much higher than average injury rate for our industry. Injuries decreased by little over 3% and unfortunately the headline figures remain largely unchanged from previous years with too many people continuing to be killed or harmed by our industry's activities.

While this makes for sobering reading, ESA nonetheless welcomes HSE's data release, which can only help to put our industry's health and safety performance firmly in the spot light, raise health and safety higher up the agenda, and perhaps prove the catalyst for the necessary change.

A hugely varied sector

However, one key aspect that is not evident from HSE's data release is that health and safety performance varies considerably within the waste and recycling industry. Our industry is probably one of the most complex and diverse of all the UK's industrial sectors, and it is arguably this sheer diversity that helps explain, in part, why our industry's health and safety record lags behind others. The industry encompasses a wide range of facilities and operations with everything from highly specialised, process-based installations (such as energy from waste, gasification and anaerobic digestion) to more manual and labour intensive sorting of mixed recyclables in material recovery facilities.

Furthermore, a whole host of players within the industry compete for and provide waste collection services to the UK's homes and business, which perhaps adds an additional layer of complexity. These include local authorities, the private sector (ESA and non-ESA Members), the third sector, SMEs and others.

HSE compiles injury data from across all these different activities and organisations to produce an aggregated total for the industry as a whole, which unfortunately does little to highlight the actual risk profile across the industry's different activities, or help to reveal if any particular sector(s) within the industry would benefit the most from targeted intervention.

Fostering a culture of continuous improvement

ESA has long championed the cause of health & safety across our industry. Our Members are focused above all on moving towards the ultimate goal of zero harm and have implemented a culture of continuous improvement in health & safety performance for the Association.

ESA's data reveal that its Members, which account for more than a third of all those employed in the industry, have achieved a 37% reduction in injuries since 2014. While we clearly still have much to do on our journey towards zero harm and while our injury rate remains higher than other industries, we are nonetheless striving to head in the right direction. Year on year, our performance has compared favourably with the rest of our industry, with HSE data revealing that for the industry as a whole, injuries actually increased by 3% over this same period.¹

ESA has a number of measures in place to help improve health and safety. ESA's Board has never regarded health and safety as a competitive area and instead has developed a culture of freely sharing information and best practice. To that end, ESA's health and safety committee serves as the primary forum for developing health and safety initiatives and improving performance.

Developing a health & safety strategy for our sector

The launch of our Health and Safety Charter in 2004 proved something of a turning point. The Charter committed ESA to reducing the incidence rate of RIDDOR² reportable injuries by 10% each year. This represented ESA's statement of intent to achieving higher standards in health and safety performance. The Charter has since been revised and on each occasion the Board has agreed to extend its commitment to further 10% year on year reduction targets. In fact, since the launch of our Charter in 2004, ESA Members have reduced injuries by 86%. ESA's commitment to the Charter was strengthened in 2006, with the launch of a Health and Safety Strategy setting out the industry's health and safety goals and the activities required to meet these goals within a clear timetable. The strategy is periodically revised by our health and safety committee and has since been more closely aligned with the strategic objectives of the Waste Industry Safety & Health (WISH) Forum.

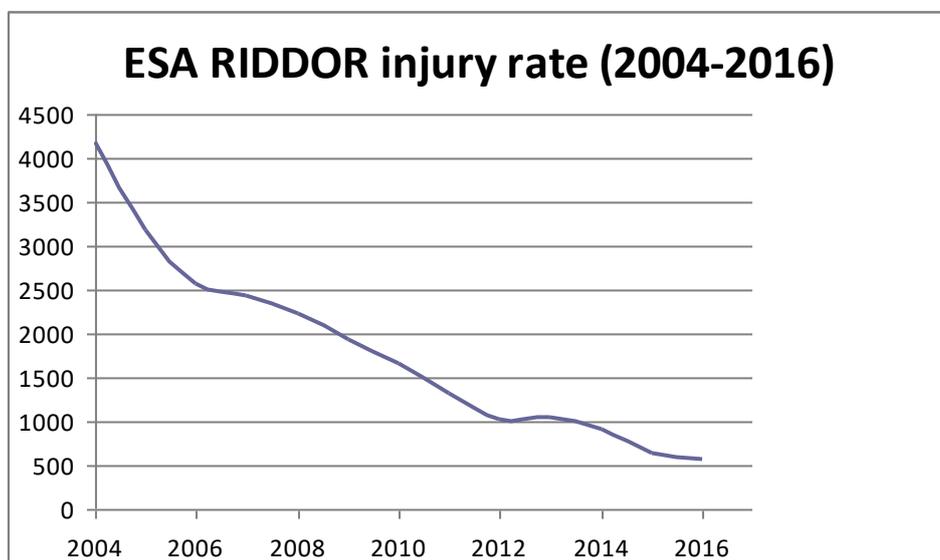
Members of ESA's health and safety committee have been the driving force behind the compilation of arguably the most robust set of health and safety statistics within the waste industry. Good data underpin the committee's work programme and its concerted effort to improve health and safety performance. Committee Members have made a number of amendments to the injury reporting initiative over the years, amending it to reflect the evolving policy landscape and to capture more detailed information on new areas of risk.

¹ It should be noted that HSE reports injury data for the financial year, while ESA uses the calendar year

² The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) is the primary indicator used by HSE and the industry for notifying and recording work related injuries

Our data reporting initiative has been extended in recent years to include data on Lost Time Injuries (LTI) and sickness absence.

ESA's latest available data (for 2016) has revealed a RIDDOR injury rate of 577 (per 100,000 employees) and our lowest injury rate yet. The graph below shows ESA's performance since the launch of our Accident Reduction Charter in 2004.



Helping to disseminate best practice

ESA will shortly publish a new report offering a more in-depth analysis of available injury data and exploring some of the underlying trends. This will offer recommendations for how best practice can be replicated across the sector so that standards are raised for all.

A more holistic and collaborative approach is required to improve health, safety and protection of the environment for the benefit of the wider sector, the public and the collective workforce. Evidence of such is already apparent as the industry continues to mature. It is also increasingly recognised that successful implementation of such an approach requires the forging of a health and safety *culture* within an organisation, whereby health and safety is interwoven into the day to day operations and strategic decisions, and where health and safety is the responsibility of all, rather than any one individual.