

Refuse Collection Vehicles Reversing Safely

A Local Authority Viewpoint

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Local Authority Responsibility

Local authorities have a legal duty to provide a service for the collection of refuse from domestic properties.

There are approximately 480 district / borough councils in the UK who have this responsibility.

Whether a local authority uses direct labour or contractors they have a responsibility both in law and morally to ensure that the activities are carried out in a safe manner.

Refuse vehicles reversing

Reversing of vehicles is high risk and a major cause of injuries and death.

In Northamptonshire between 1999 and 2002 there were 3 fatalities that were attributed to reversing manoeuvres. One of these involved my authority and as such the Northamptonshire Local Authority Safety Advisors Group worked towards establishing a common standard for reversing procedures and managing refuse driving operations.

Available on Kettering B. C. web site - www.kettering.gov.uk/reversingoperations

A best practice guidance 'Waste and Recycling Vehicles in Street Collection' has been produced recently by the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum (WISH) and the Health and Safety Executive based on a guidance produced by the Northamptonshire Local Authority Safety Advisors Group and is available on the HSE web site - www.hse.gov.uk/waste/streetcollection.pdf.

Reversing manoeuvres are carried out to gain access to collection points and usually where complete control cannot be exercised over the environment due to,

- Street geography
- Street furniture
- Other vehicles
- Pedestrians
- Weather

And often involves risks to employees and the public such as

- Loaders working at the vehicle.
- Pedestrians e.g. members of the public including:
 - a. Children (who might not understand the risks).
 - b. People with impaired sight, hearing, or limited mobility, (who might be unaware of the activity and its risks, and/or may not be able to avoid the moving vehicle).
- Other road users like motorists cyclists, horse riders (who might unexpectedly appear during reversing operations).

Reducing the risk

- Eliminating reversing
- Reduce distances reversed.
- Reduce time/duration spent reversing.
- Re-locating waste/recycling collection points (inform customers)
- Using more appropriate vehicles.
- Changing collection methods
- Planned collection times, e.g. to avoid.
 - a. Busy times on major roads before traffic builds up
 - b. Shopping areas during opening hours
 - c. School start and finish times

The reversing manoeuvre

The use of mirrors and cameras can assist drivers in seeing who is behind them and sounders may warn persons that a vehicle is reversing. However neither can prevent persons, especially those who may have had a lapse of concentration, disabilities or children, from encroaching the crush zone of a vehicle.

The use of reversing assistants provides a direct means of warning persons of vehicles reversing and reduces the risk of injury.

Reversing assistants must be trained and be competent to ensure their safety.

- They must be in a safe position – NOT directly behind the vehicle, 5m to 10m behind and 1m out, preferably on the pavement
- They must give a clear signal to the driver to start the reversing manoeuvre.
- No directional signals unless specifically trained
- They must **not** load whilst vehicle is reversing (ie reverse, load, reverse, load)

Number of reversing manoeuvres

At Kettering

Our refuse vehicles (7 rounds) make **600** planned reversing manoeuvres per week.
This equates to **31200** reversing manoeuvres carried out per year.

Nationally

The number of manoeuvres carried out has to be in excess of 15 million per year.
The potential for an accident is therefore high.

Those affected by injures / fatalities

Families of injured
Drivers and Crew
Work colleagues
Investigators

Reflections on incident at Kettering

Following the incident at my authority, Kettering, I sat in the coroner's court and had to give evidence in the magistrates court when our driver was being prosecuted for driving without due care and attention.

There were no witnesses to the incident however it was assumed to be our vehicle as it had been in the area and injuries to the deceased were that related to a heavy vehicle. Over the pursuing months a detailed investigation was carried out internally and by the police. A hearing at the coroner's court concluded that had someone been at the rear of the vehicle then the accident would not have happened. I remember seeing the parents of the deceased child, the driver and crew members stricken with grief and crying as the coroner summarised her findings of accidental death. Some 12 months after the accident the driver received a summons for driving without due care and attention. I was called to court to give evidence and as I stood in the witness box I remember seeing the grief on the faces of the parents opposite and the sadness of the driver. There were no witnesses to the accident and the driver was cleared of the charges he faced, however he had not worked from the time of the accident or since.

At Kettering we now use Reversing Assistants on all domestic and trade collection rounds.

The increase in costs and time due to using reversing assistants is negligible and the crews have a reassurance that they are doing as much as they reasonably can to prevent accidents.

Please Stop and Think if reversing cannot be avoided can you afford not to use Reversing Assistants.

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