



Position statement

Safety in the operation of automatic bin lifting equipment on RCVs

Background

Wheeled refuse collection bins (both domestic “wheelie bins” and larger size trade waste bins) have been emptied using bin-lifts since at least the 1990s. Lifting mechanisms can operate in manual, semi-automatic, and automatic modes. Despite technological developments and collective industry experience with this equipment a significant number of serious accidents, including deaths, still occur. The HSE (Health and Safety Executive) have been consulted on this position statement. To illustrate the issue, WISH reference document [WISH REF02](#) contains a number of case studies on the types of accidents, and fatalities that have occurred. Accidents where:

- Workers’ clothing has become entangled either directly in the lifting mechanism, or with the bin itself, resulting in an operative being tipped into the hopper, or injured in the lifting machinery
- Workers have approached to hand-load material into the hopper (such as manual loading of bagged waste or ‘side waste’), or to clear material in the hopper, and have accidentally activated the automatic bin-lift and been thrown into the vehicle hopper
- Workers have approached in order to place material in the hopper, or to clear material in the hopper, and have accidentally activated the bin-lift and have had limbs clamped and crushed by the lifting mechanism
- Members of the public have approached unattended mechanisms and either accidentally activated the bin-lift and been thrown into the hopper, or have become entangled in the mechanism, deposited in the hopper, or crushed
- Bins have fallen from lifts during loading and emptying striking workers or operatives

What you need to do

All operators of RCVs are urged to review their use of semi-automatic and automatic bin lifting equipment against the information included in [Waste 04 \(Waste and Recycling vehicles in street collection\)](#), [WISH INFO 10](#), [WISH REF02](#), and the information provided by their bin-lift supplier/s. In particular, you need to ensure that you have in place safe systems of work, including your risk assessments and instructions to operatives, which identify and address:

- That semi-automatic and automatic modes are more hazardous than manual mode and how your safe systems of work have been designed to eliminate and reduce those hazards
- Situations where a bin should not be presented for lifting and tipping including damaged bins, overweight bins, and over full (“grinning” or “top hatting”) bins

- Where automatic, semi-automatic and manual modes should and should not be used, based on supplier's instructions and your assessment of risk. While it is not practical for every individual RCV bin collection to be risk assessed, sufficient understanding of the general principles of each mode of operation of lifting equipment should be provided through instruction, training, and supervision to allow individual crews to make appropriate judgements. Automatic/semi-automatic should not generally be the default mode used all day without appropriate risk assessment, training, safe systems of work and adequate supervision being in place to manage the resulting risks
- Situations where it is not appropriate to use semi-automatic/automatic bin-lifting. For example:
 - That larger trade bins should not be emptied using automatic lifting mode
 - Where collection points are well spaced, such as some rural areas, resulting in the time saving being insufficient, compared to increased risk, to justify automatic mode
 - That only manual lifting mode is used where there is any form of hand loading, such as of bagged or side waste
- Work sequences for placing bins onto automatic bin lifters, including clear rules for which worker has responsibility for selecting manual, semi-automatic, or automatic modes
- The safe standing positions for workers during the tipping cycle
- What to do when bins 'hang-up', waste jams and blocks during lifting and tipping, clearing of debris/detritus from the lifting mechanism and/or hopper, or other similar problems, and your arrangements to ensure that machinery cannot be inadvertently restarted during such tasks
- Your arrangements to ensure that operators and members of the public do not approach an open (no bin in place) bin-lift which is in automatic mode
- Your monitoring, instruction, and training arrangements to ensure effective compliance with your risk assessments, procedures, and training

The future

The measures outlined above are 'procedural', such as setting rules, instructing, and training workers in what to do and what not to do . Procedural controls are known not to be 100% effective at all times – people do not always 'do the right thing'. More effective are physical controls, such as physical machinery safety measures. WISH would urge the industry and suppliers to work together to develop effective and practical physical controls so that over time the current unacceptable toll of accidents and fatalities involving bin-lift mechanisms is brought to an end. This position statement will be kept under review and may be changed in consideration of any relevant future information received.



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