



CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE – 21ST FEBRUARY 2011

SUBJECT: REFUSE & CLEANSING SERVICE – INCLEMENT WEATHER ISSUES

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Corporate Safety Committee of the issues faced by the refuse & cleansing service in cases of severe inclement weather such as snow and ice.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As members of the Committee are aware, the winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 have resulted in severe falls of snow and periods of extremely low temperatures leading to ice, frozen compacted snow and resultant dangerous driving conditions.
- 2.2 The preparedness of the refuse and cleansing service to deal with such conditions has been questioned by a member of the council and the purpose of this report is therefore to provide the Corporate Safety Committee with all of the facts in relation to this issue.

3. KEY SAFETY CONCERNS

- 3.1 On a normal day the Authority deploys 30 vehicles (mainly 22-26 tonne refuse collection vehicles) to collect refuse, recycling and food/garden waste. These are specialist vehicles which are required for the collection operation.
- 3.2 The weather conditions outlined in 2.1 above give rise to a number of key safety concerns from an employee and public liability point of view. These include: -
- i. Vehicle safety (heavy goods and smaller vehicles).
 - ii. The potential for staff to suffer slips, trips and falls when providing services.
 - iii. Risks associated with manual handling when moving wheeled bins in heavy snow.
- 3.3 As members will appreciate there are significant risks associated with fully laden refuse collection vehicle (weighing circa 26 tonnes) sliding out of control on ice or compacted snow. Such an occurrence has the potential to cause death and/or destruction to persons and property. Consequently, vehicle safety is the prime area of concern out of the safety concerns outlined above.
- 3.4 Safety was therefore a key factor in this winters decision to send a single vehicle into streets (deemed safe to access by the driver) to collect all waste fractions (refuse, recycling and food waste) in one pass. This dramatically reduced risks when compared to the use of 3 vehicles to collect the fractions separately.

- 3.5 Our experience also demonstrated that the main safety issue is ice and compacted, frozen snow. While snow tyres are clearly an option in conditions where there is fresh snow fall, their benefits are negligible in icy conditions. In addition, while snow tyres may enable a vehicle to access streets where there is soft, deep, snowfall, the other risks associated with waste collection (such as manual handling risks resulting from moving heavy wheeled bins in deep snow) may then prevent normal service being carried out.

4. MANAGING THE RISKS

- 4.1 The service has effectively assessed and managed the above risks to date by employing the following practices: -
- i. Vehicle Safety
Route risk assessments are in place and drivers are expected to undertake dynamic risk assessments to assess the safety of each street/road as they encounter it. In addition, prior to sending the fleet of vehicles out, a general assessment of the Borough's road conditions is made by a supervisor(s) using 4x4 vehicles.
 - ii. Preventing Slips, Trips & Falls
Again, a suitable range of risk assessments are in place so that employees can assess the safety of the task in accordance with the conditions they are faced with. "Yak-trak", overshoes have also been ordered and will be issued to staff to provide grip while walking. However, it should be noted that these overshoes are only of real benefit in snow and are of limited benefit in icy conditions.
 - iii. Controlling Manual Handling Risks
Again, a suitable range of risk assessments are in place so that employees can assess the safety of the task in accordance with the conditions they are faced with. In addition all waste collection operatives have received manual handling training to complement the risk assessments in place.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 During the latest period of severe inclement weather (over Xmas and the New Year), Caerphilly County Borough were more successful than many other Authorities across the UK in rapidly removing waste from its streets.
- 5.2 When the collection service was suspended, all of the staff were deployed in assisting the highways service in gritting and snow clearance in an around town centres and OAP complexes.
- 5.3 It is also important for the committee to understand that the waste collection service is not a "blue light" emergency service and that safety of the Authority's staff and members of the public is paramount. In this regard, the Authority's employees have all of the correct equipment and risk assessment processes in place to ensure that these safe working practise and the provision of an effective service are balanced.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Corporate Safety Committee is asked to note the content of the report.

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