

## Poster-discussion: Specific occupations and exposures 2

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### WORK-RELATED ILL HEALTH AND ASSOCIATED SICKNESS ABSENCE IN THE WASTE AND RECYCLING INDUSTRY

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**Objectives** Approximately 200 000 workers are employed in the UK waste sector and an estimated 1.5 million working days per year are perhaps lost across the sector due to work related sickness absence, at a cost of around £100 million per year. HSL commenced a 3-year survey in 2011, aiming to quantify sickness absence across the sector and identify specific work areas where work related ill health may be particularly prevalent.

**Methods** A sample of local authorities delivering municipal waste services and private waste management companies, operating across England, Scotland and Wales, are currently being recruited to the survey. Participating organisations are being requested to provide sickness absence data pertaining to their workforce, broken down across standard ill health and work area categories.

**Results** Potentially significant work related health hazards in waste workers include risks of musculoskeletal injury from carrying activities, respiratory health risks associated with inhalation of dusts during domestic and particularly green waste collection, and from composting organic waste, and risks of infections and skin irritation/dermatitis due to poor personal hygiene during waste handling. Initial analysis of pilot data suggests the risk of absences attributable to musculo-skeletal disorders and certain respiratory problems to be collectively around fourfold higher in several operational waste worker groups relative to office workers. More detailed analysis is planned to elucidate potential work related effects.

**Conclusions** Improved understanding of the profile of work related ill health in waste workers will help ensure that any interventions introduced are appropriately targeted. UK Crown Copyright 2011.