



## **The Waste Industry Safety and Health (WISH) Forum latest information document for managing risk for waste management industry.**

This briefing provides a summary of main changes/points of the ninth version of the information document for managing coronavirus risk for the waste management industry. WISH has stated that the latest guidance is a routine maintenance update that doesn't contain any significant changes of approach.

### **Key Issues:**

- This document is a part of WISH's ongoing updating of its advice to the waste industry on how to manage COVID-19 in the workplace.
- The document highlights that even in times of increasing vaccinations 'good hygiene' is still the most important consideration in combatting the spread of COVID-19.
- As well as hygiene, the continuation and constant monitoring of risks both present and potential is a key requirement to ensure both staff safety and operational resilience.
- In addition to the advice within the document there is a need to consider the future sustainability of services through ensuring staff availability by the redeployment of suitably trained staff but also the need to consider individual staff needs to ensure the mental well-being of the workforce.

### **Background**

Since the serious outbreak of Coronavirus in early 2020, WISH have produced a regular series of guidance notes on how waste operators, both public and private, should manage COVID-19 and ensure the safety of their staff

Due to the relatively low, if indeed any outbreaks of Covid-19 in the waste industry, it is believed that the principles that were developed for the first lockdown, (social distancing, good hygiene, self-isolating etc.) have been very successful and have been largely maintained to the present time.

However, as vaccination rates increase there is a concern that people may beginning to 'let down their guard' and as such although the latest guidance has moved away from a 'must do' approach to an advisory approach where key elements of the practices previously put in place are still important to maintain.

Because of our greater understanding of how Coronavirus can be spread – common touch points, shared facilities, direct physical contact and airborne transmission the information document rightly points out that good hygiene is the most important control for preventing the spread of any infection. This cannot be over-emphasised.

The document states that:

*'Good hygiene practices should already be in place in waste management operations – these MUST be maintained. Employees should be instructed to:*

- *Use tissues to cover mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze (CATCH IT)*
- *Place used tissues in a bin (or bag) as soon as possible (BIN IT)*
- *Wash their hands regularly with soap and water (KILL IT)*
- *Clean surfaces and contact points regularly to get rid of germs (KILL IT)*

*For the above to be effective, employees need to have tissues available and, if employees are not site based, bags should also be available to dispose of used tissues. Employers should provide these. As the pandemic has progressed over time there may have been a temptation to concentrate on other measures, such as screens and face-coverings. However, the first and most important control is good hygiene'.*

Within the document is also the concern that whilst risk assessments are still a key weapon to keep infections low by ensuring the required processes are identified, simply identifying them is not enough, rather the regular checking of existing and identification of new risks must be carried out to prevent outbreaks.

Whilst other precautions are mentioned, it is noted that the use of a transparent plastic or similar face shield/visors has become commonplace, the evidence is that they provide little protection and should not be used on their own. However, regarding the requirement to wear masks in internal or confined areas, this is still recommended, and in some situations may be considered mandatory.

The ninth version of the WISH guidance included updates to all links and references, as well as the introduction of additional ones.

The document can be accessed at the following link. <https://www.wishforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/INFO-13-COVID19-and-waste-management-issue-11-6-Aug-21.pdf>

## **APSE Comments**

Undoubtedly the information contained within the WISH documents has proved invaluable to the waste industry during this pandemic and many of the suggestions will need to become embedded in the way we deliver these services in the future, as even when the pandemic ends, Coronavirus will remain endemic both in the UK and globally.

By adopting the approaches contained within the WISH guidance document and also the many other sources of advice contained within it, then the industry will learn to cope more effectively with the virus in the future

The point about the virus being endemic globally is an important one, as the waste industry is a global industry with networks that spread internationally (sources of technology, infrastructure, markets for materials etc.) so as an industry there will be a need to consider the impact coronavirus can have outside the UK, and how we can prepare for these eventualities.

Other issues which the pandemic has raised is in relation to staff and need to balance their health and well-being with operational requirements. Protecting staff has required clinically extremely vulnerable persons to 'shield' and others to self-isolate due to contact with infected people. This has resulted in a lack of staff across services and the need to redeploy from other areas to maintain critical services. A consequence of these actions has been an increase in mental health issues amongst staff and it has therefore been suggested that management styles of the future will need to consider what approaches are best suited to the post-COVID environment. In some circumstances this may also need to take into consideration individualistic matters, balanced against service needs and fairness and transparency across staff and service teams.

Clearly the pandemic is far from over, and its impacts will be felt for many years, but undoubtedly the approaches contained within the WISH information document will ensure that the waste industry is in a better place to deal with both coronavirus and any future pandemics. APSE would like to thank the team at WISH for their helpful cooperation with APSE's own COVID support approach to its member councils throughout the pandemic.

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