



OHS Learning Meeting

Waste Pickers

Perspective

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Waste Pickers at Work



Hazards & Risks

- Handling waste poses many health risk to workers in general, formal and informal.
- Risks: even greater for informal workers due to unprotected daily exposure to contaminants and hazardous materials (fecal matter, paper with toxic materials, bottles with chemical residues, needles, batteries...)
- Some studies indicate a higher prevalence of minor psychiatric disorders amongst waste pickers , likely the result of stressful conditions.

Hazards & Risks

- Waste pickers may be run over by trucks or become victims of surface subsidence, slides, fires, toxic fumes.

Toxic fumes in
a Maputo dump



Characteristics of the work

A person wearing a yellow safety vest and a mask, standing in a field of tall grass or reeds. The person is looking down, and the background is a soft-focus natural setting.

- Waste pickers jobs are not protected by the state and therefore are excluded from the social security system and other benefits of formal contracting.
- Waste pickers generally minimize risks as this work is generally the only source of income.
- They are most often resistant to use protective equipment as they argue they slow down their ability to recover recyclables.
- They are generally resistant to new work environment such as conveyor belts in recycling warehouses and other work improvements.

What is needed

A person wearing a yellow safety vest and a mask, standing in a recycling facility. The background is filled with various types of waste and recycling materials.

1. Improvement of working conditions through:

- Capacity building courses: e.g. safety at work, technical aspects of recycling, etc.;
- Provision of infrastructure for sorting, baling, etc.;
- Equipment for individual protection (gloves, masks, etc.);
- Ergonomic manual carts for collection;
- Ergonomic sorting devices at recycling warehouses

2. Health care and social protection schemes;

What is needed

3. Address risks specific to the sector through:

- Programs for the eradication of child labour;
- Incentives to help families keep children at school, with compensation programs to encourage eradicating child labour in the sector;
- Provision of work facilities such as crèches (day care services), etc.
- Move from open dumps to sanitary landfilling with incorporation of waste pickers in properly designed recycling sheds/warehouses

4. Plan interventions/innovations in a stepwise/participatory manner.

Thanks,
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