# BIOHAZARDOUS and hazardous material: refuse collection

Refuse collection employees face a unique exposure to various chemicals and waste as opposed to other industries because the material being dealt with is unknown. Each refuse collection facility typically has a policy that is shared with their customers on appropriate items allowed to be discarded however this does not completely get rid of the risk.

Refuse workers can be exposed to various chemicals, blood, feces etc. and in turn bacteria, fungi and other toxins. This can lead to illness, rash, gastrointestinal issues, contraction of viruses and more. That is why following all safety procedures and using appropriate personal protective equipment is vital for this industry.

*Chemical exposure can occur 4 different ways:*

* Inhalation: breathing in dusts, mists and vapors
* Ingestion: eating contaminated food (food that has been exposed to airborne contaminants)
* Absorption: skin contact with a chemical
* Injection: forcing an agent into the body through a needle or high-pressure device

*How to protect against chemical hazards:*

* When manual waste collection is taking place ensure that appropriate respiratory protection is being worn depending on the material being collected
* Use specified personal protective equipment (PPE) that may include chemical-splash goggles, a respirator, safety gloves (not only to protect against liquids but sharp items such as needles, metal, glass etc.), steel-toed shoes and safety glasses
* Inspect all PPE before use. Look for defects in the equipment such as cracks, missing parts, rips, etc.
* Know where eye wash and first aid kits are located and be aware of procedures to take following an exposure
* Always use care before eating or touching hands to face; wash them thoroughly
* Leave contaminated clothing at work to eliminate the possibility of exposing others to the hazards