

SWITCH – APSE National Health & Safety Conference

6th August 2025

**Violence & Aggression in the Waste &
Resource Sector**

Jim Brown, Chair – SWITCH Forum

About SWITCH



- A multi-partnership forum made up of organisations across all sectors within the resource management industry.
- Aim to provide leadership by working collaboratively to raise standards of H&S, training, learning and development, and technical competence, and to promote the Scottish resource management industry as an attractive career choice.
- To carry out the work of SWITCH we rely on the good will and voluntary contributions of our SWITCH ambassadors.



SWITCH Key Stakeholders



Waste
Managers
Network



UWS Training Courses

- Developed and delivered in collaboration with University of the West Of Scotland (UWS)
- Targeted at the team leader/ supervisor level of employee
- Two SCQF Level 8, 20-credit modules for the waste industry
- Great foundation to invest and build on
- Each module will be delivered over 12 weeks, 3 hours per week
- A minimum cohort size of 20 students being recruited
- Presenters from the waste and resource sector!



SWITCH MEMBERSHIP

BECOME A SWITCH FORUM MEMBER

*Name



*Email

*Telephone

*Organisation

As a member of SWITCH I will become an ambassador for the waste and resource management sector.

As an ambassadors I will make every reasonable effort to -

- Promote the SWITCH SCIO and its objectives.
- Actively promote SWITCH activities within my organisation and networks.
- Support events and other promotional activities; e.g. by providing speakers for events, developing case studies, writing articles and demonstrating good practice.
- Promote Health and Safety in my sector
- Promote Learning and Development in my sector

I agree ☐

Request to join SWITCH



Summary of V&E Campaign



- Waste & recycling sector staff face increasing violence, including verbal abuse, physical threats, and dangerous behaviours
- Such incidents worsened during COVID-19 pandemic and have not significantly decreased since
- The campaign was targeted to raise awareness about this issues, highlighting that staff are merely enforcing regulations, not responsible for them
- Videos featuring real stories from affected staff, stressing the need to stop such behaviour SWITCH Forum



The Scale of Violence



Statistics & Trends

- According to research, over 30% of waste management employees report experiencing some form of abuse
- Aggressive behaviours often occur in reaction to missed collections, recycling rules, and public dissatisfaction with waste management services



The Scale of Violence



Impact on Staff

- The physical and emotional toll of constant exposure to abusive behaviour is immense. This leads to stress, anxiety, and burnout among employees, making it hard for them to focus on safety and productivity.



Understanding & Triggers



Key Triggers of Aggression

- **Miscommunication:** Lack of clarity in waste management rules (e.g. recycling instructions) leads to public frustration
- **Missed Collections:** Delayed or missed waste collection can provoke hostility

Waste sector staff are often on the receiving end of public frustration but they are simply enforcing policies, not creating them. Misunderstanding about this dynamic often lead to unnecessary confrontation



Case Studies from SWITCH Forum



- **Real Stories from Workers:** As part of the campaign, SWITCH highlighted real workers stories through videos to raise awareness of the human cost of this issues and to encourage empathy from the public
- [Example 1](#): Waste worker faced physical intimidation after a public disagreement over incorrect waste in bins
- [Example 2](#): A team in a recycling centre reported being frequently verbally harassed by members of the public frustrated with sorting requirements



Case Studies from SWITCH Forum



Consequences of Aggression



On Employees

- Deteriorating mental health (anxiety, fear, stress)
- Increased absenteeism due to psychological and physical concerns

On Public Services

- Potential delays or disruptions in waste collection services
- Escalating safety concerns lead to higher operational costs



Campaign Objectives & Call to Action



Objective

- Reduce the levels of violence and aggression faced by waste workers by building public awareness and encouraging respect for their role

Call to Action

- Communities, businesses, and authorities must collaborate to ensure the safety of waste management staff. The public is encouraged to be patient, respectful, and understanding of the challenges faced by waste sector workers

Preventing & Managing Aggression



Public Education

- Increasing awareness around waste management rules to reduce frustrations
- Encouraging respect for waste workers, who perform an essential public service

Staff Training

- Providing waste sector staff with conflict resolution skills
- Introducing safety measures to protect employees from aggressive encounters

Community Engagement

- Campaigns like SWITCH to seek to work with local authorities, businesses and public to create positive relations, discourage hostility, and implement local support systems



Conclusion



- Violence & Aggression towards waste sector workers is a growing concern that needs to be addressed. Public education and better communication can help resolve this issue
- Respect for waste sector staff and better public engagement is crucial to curbing this trend of aggression
- Please share the videos among your teams and peer groups to help raise awareness
- THANK YOU

