



CITY OF ATLANTA  
City Auditor's Office  
Leslie Ward, City Auditor  
404.330.6452

April 2014

### ***Why We Did This Audit***

Our analysis of workers' compensation data suggested that targeted efforts to improve training, supervision, and use of protective equipment could reduce the number and cost of injury claims. The Department of Public Works had the highest number of claims per 100 full-time employees in the city.

### ***What We Recommended***

To improve the safety culture in solid waste and to help reduce injuries, the commissioner of public works should:

- Draft legislation for city council consideration to discontinue allowing customers to use non city-issued cans.
- Revise job descriptions for laborers and operators to indicate the weight that candidates should be able to lift repetitively.
- Establish disciplinary actions for safety violations and incorporate compliance with safety procedures in performance appraisals.

To support department and citywide safety efforts, the city's executive director of safety should:

- Document required safety training in a written policy and work with departments to ensure that all employees receive required training.
- Develop a structured safety training program that includes clear hiring criteria, is developed and delivered in compliance with the city's safety-related training policy, and provides for ongoing and post-accident training.

The commissioner of human resources should:

- Document the designation of safety-sensitive positions through written communications to facilitate accurate information and ongoing implementation of drug testing efforts.
- Conduct random drug and alcohol testing of all solid waste employees quarterly, consistent with best practices.

For more information regarding this report, please contact Stephanie Jackson at 404.330.6678 or [sjackson@atlantaga.gov](mailto:sjackson@atlantaga.gov)

## ***Performance Audit:***

### **Department of Public Works**

### **Solid Waste Safety Practices**

#### ***What We Found***

The number of injuries among solid waste collectors and drivers is high. Our September 2013 audit of workers' compensation found that the number of claims reported by city employees was much higher than the national average for local governments. Public works employees accounted for 22% of the overall claims filed by city employees from fiscal year 2010 through March 2013, and solid waste employees accounted for 83% of public works' total claims.

Employees told us that management emphasizes completing garbage routes and makes safety a lower priority. We observed collection crews using unsafe collection techniques while on routes, including:

- jumping on and off garbage trucks while the trucks were moving
- using cell phones and headphones, and smoking while collecting garbage
- failing to hold on to truck handrails and keep both feet on the platforms while the trucks were in motion
- rolling herbie curbies in front of oncoming cars
- serving both sides of the street in heavy traffic
- using poor lifting techniques

Risk of injury could also be increased because city residents may use non-city-issued cans, which require more lifting and limit the efficiency gained by using semi-automated pick-up methods.

Solid waste has no written policy that describes consequences for employees who violate safety procedures and has no written policy for safety training requirements. Some employees have not had safety training in over a year. Although solid waste officials told us that they have disciplined employees for violating safety procedures, management was unable to provide records of any corrective action taken.

Human resources conducted random drug and alcohol testing once a year during 2012 and 2013. One or more employees tested positive for alcohol or drugs in each year.