

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a yellow safety vest, stands in a field of discarded waste. She is looking down at a large, full yellow mesh bag she is holding. The background is filled with various pieces of trash, including plastic bottles and other debris, under a bright, slightly hazy sky.

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 waste. The person is looking down at the ground, which is covered in various pieces of trash and debris. The background is a bright, hazy outdoor 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

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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