

Understanding the National Domestic Waste Collection Standards

The backlog in waste service delivery in South Africa is a well-known fact, and there is increased pressure on municipalities to provide waste collection services to previously unserved areas.

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To redress past imbalances in waste collection service provision, it is imperative that acceptable, affordable and sustainable waste services be provided to all South Africans.

Critical to the provisioning of services is an acknowledgement of the differentiated capacities of municipalities in providing the services. However, there needs to be some level of uniformity in the range of services provided so that citizens of this country do not experience different standards of service. Therefore, there is a need for municipalities to adopt similar services standards. Currently there are major discrepancies in the provisioning of waste services: in particular low-income and rural areas still receive very low levels of service, as opposed to high-income areas. In this regard the Department of Environmental Affairs, with the assistance of the CSIR, developed the National Domestic Waste Collection Standards, which contain a range of service standards appropriate to different contexts. The standards, which came into effect on

1 February 2011, also provide for the implementation of the waste management hierarchy that requires waste avoidance, reduction, reuse, recycling, recovery and waste treatment, and disposal as a last resort.

Development

The development of the standards involved a detailed literature review of existing standards, telephonic interviews with 125 municipalities and two series of three workshops. In acknowledging the differences in municipal capacities and circumstances, the standards are not necessarily requiring changes in the current creative collection systems implemented in municipalities. Rather, they are requiring these systems to function well and deliver an acceptable standard of service to all households.

The standards are applicable throughout the country and based on the principles of equity, the affordability and availability of resources within municipalities, clarity and ease with which the standards can be implemented, practicality and community

participation in the design of applicable and appropriate collection systems.

Service levels

Varying levels of service between areas are set depending on the practicality and cost-efficiency of delivering the service:

- on-site appropriate and regularly supervised disposal (applicable mainly to remote rural areas with low-density settlements and farms, supervised by a waste management officer)
- community transfer to a central collection point (medium-density settlements)
- organised transfer to central collection points and/or kerbside collection (high-density settlements).
- A mixture of b) and c) can also be used for medium to high-density settlements.

The standards

The standards address aspects of waste collection and collection vehicles, drop-off centres for recyclables, health and safety, communication and awareness creation, including complaints handling and customer service standards for kerbside collection.

All municipalities must encourage the separation of waste at the source of generation, while the implementation of source separation is an immediate requirement in all metropolitan and secondary cities. Municipalities are required to provide an enabling environment for households to recycle domestic waste. This may translate into well-kept drop-off centres, established in collaboration with industry partners, or kerbside collection of recyclables where appropriate. The guidelines included in the standards for the collection of recyclables acknowledge the importance of economies of scale to offset the transport costs. The use of existing infrastructure and collaboration with recycling companies is



also supported. Standards for receptacles revolve around fitness for purpose, the protection of human and environmental health and pollution prevention. Guidelines for the selection of receptacles are provided. The standard for collection frequency is based on the potential of waste volumes to cause a nuisance in terms of odours and volumes of waste being stored. Non-recyclable waste must be removed at least once a week depending on the size of the receptacle and the volume of waste generated. Recyclable waste, conversely, must be removed once every two weeks. Waste deposited at communal collection points must be collected within 24 hours.

Collection vehicles that are the most appropriate for the specific task and geographical terrain must be used. Guidelines for the selection of collection vehicles are provided. Health and safety issues are addressed by, among others, prohibiting the use of collection vehicles for any other purpose while collecting and transporting waste. Windblown litter is another concern addressed by the introduction of a requirement for the use of

closed vehicles (covered to prevent wind-blown litter). Non-compatible vehicles must be phased out, but no time limit is prescribed.

The health and safety of waste collection staff is addressed through personal protective equipment, the introduction of regular medical check-ups and ongoing training on health and safety issues.

Awareness

Communication and general awareness-raising regarding waste is the assigned responsibility of the designated waste management officer. These include waste-related issues, of which awareness needs to be created within households, handling and resolving waste service complaints within a set period and maintaining an efficient and effective register. The time frame for responding to complaints is set at 24 hours. The complainer must receive notification of how the complaint is addressed within this 24-hour period. Complaints by both households and waste collectors (including service providers and the municipality) are covered. It is made very clear that all waste-related

communication to household residents must be through the waste management officer. Waste collection staff may not enter into a debate or intimidate household residents and residents may not intimidate waste collection staff to collect waste that is not separated according to the guidelines or that was disposed of in contravention of any law. Customer service standards specific to kerbside collection is also addressed, i.e. collection on the same day every week, the return of receptacles to households, etc. Replacement of lost or stolen waste bins as well as vandalised bins is for the account of the household, whereas receptacles damaged by the service provider or municipality will be for the municipality.

It is believed that the implementation of the standards will remove discrepancies in the provisioning of waste service, increase public-private partnerships in service delivery and enhance community participation in the design of domestic waste collection services. **35**

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