

Plan of Action for Waste Handling in the Nordic Countries

Foreword

The expert group for “Environment and Waste” under EPSU’s Nordic Reference group for Public Service Authorities has compiled this document. The basic material has been provided by our respective organisations, but is also the result of a seminar, which we arranged in the year 2000 for employees and union representatives within the waste sector in the Nordic countries.

**For the Expert Group “Environment and Waste”
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Action Plan for Waste Handling in the Nordic Countries

Waste handling is a basic societal service. If waste from households and companies is not collected, transported away and dealt with in a safe way, problems of a hygienic as well as environmental nature will occur quickly.

The Nordic Reference Group for Public Service Authorities under the European Public Services Union (EPSU) is working to keep the handling of household as well as dangerous waste within the responsibility of the communes and also to make sure that the responsibility is not undermined by various trade/industry agreements between authorities and industry.

The Reference Group believes that waste handling is best taken care of by letting responsibility for administrating and operating the collection, transport and handling of the waste be administered by the communes. Exposing public services of life and health to competition must be treated with great caution. When the waste handling process is left for the market powers to deal with, the need for control and supervision from the environmental and health protection authorities increases. Experience shows that market control gives worse service in the sparsely populated areas where waste collecting is less profitable.

Public interests

Waste handling is today an issue of great interest for environmental protection authorities, politicians and the public. Waste and recycling sectors are possibly the area where positive environmental efforts have come the farthest in the Nordic Countries. The sorting out of different fractions of recyclable or reusable waste is increasing in all countries. Plans for waste handling are adopted by local and central authorities and source categorisation is on its way of becoming a natural part of the everyday life for us all, as citizens. The Reference Group is supporting this and works for its development in our different countries.

The Nordic Reference Group for Public Service Authorities of the EPSU aims to work for:

- That the goals set up by the EU and Nordic environmental authorities to prevent the accumulation of waste and reduce waste quantities are achieved as soon as possible
- That the unions concerned by the waste sector develop waste issues in cooperation with environmental organizations and the general public within the framework of the Agenda 21 Project

- That dangerous waste will be kept and handled separately from household and industrial waste
- A uniform and publicly controlled waste sector in the Nordic countries/EU
- That agreements between central authorities and trade and industry will not deprive the municipalities of the responsibility and possibility to offer its inhabitants a good and equitable service irrespective of locality and economy
- That authorities and assigners will specify clear and strict demands concerning “bid purchases” as well as control and evaluation/follow-up of activities and that under entrepreneurs and other contractors within the waste sector will be included by the same demands and control
- That all companies within the waste sector shall have a quality and systematic work environment control
- That there be developed hygienic, environmental and work environmental practical methods for reuse and recycling waste
- That environmental and health protection authorities will follow up waste handling in municipalities by regular controls
- That assigners will be responsible for controlling and following up the contractors’ commissions and the systematic work environment control

The interests of the employees

For more than a century the Nordic union movement has fought for the employees right to wages which they can live on, work for all with a decent work environment and a workers influence over decisions made in the work place. Today we see that some of the achieved rights cannot be enforced when activities are being subjected to competition, internationalisation, reorganisation or company transfers.

The losing party in the competition for waste handling is often the public, who experience a more expensive but degraded waste service and employees, who by lower tariff agreements are pressed to be stressed under a heavier work burden. This is a development that the Reference Group wants to change.

The Nordic reference group for public service agencies aims to work for:

- That exposure to competition, internationalisation, restructuring or transfers should not lead to worsened employment conditions for the employees
- That tariff agreements/contracts, internal control and environmental safety systems and social demands should be positive factors when bid evaluating
- That guidelines be drawn up for daily work efforts that will apply to/be valid for all actors within the sector
- That work environment considerations as well as environmental, health protection and safety aspects shall be satisfied when purchasing equipment and transport vehicles and when extending the waste factory
- That recycling and composting projects will be designed and evaluated in relation also to work environment and hygiene, health and the surrounding environment for the population
- That new systems and equipment will go through an environment and health consequence assessment before being operated
- That employees within waste sector are given frequent health controls and when needed possibilities to adapted work assignments and flexible pension rules
- That present piece work rate systems are changed for employees in the waste sector and wage systems are developed which are built on a basic guaranteed wage
- That employees within the waste sector are given a good basic education in the profession as well as access to further education

- That local authority managers and handling officers in waste sector are given access to further education to maintain their competence, so that the need for hiring expensive consultants with bad local knowledge can be minimized.
- That the cooperation between municipalities and private waste removal companies is further developed in the Nordic countries through the Reference Group.

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