

## Using Compactors Safely

Compactors are everywhere—members of the public and trained employees alike use them in retail premises, offices and civic amenity sites. Industries of all sorts rely on compactors and other packer units to process materials from many different sources.

Compactors help the public and businesses compress waste and recyclable materials to save space and make their operations more efficient. But the ubiquity of compactors does not guarantee their safety—substantial safety risks threaten anyone operating a compactor. As a business owner or manager, you need to identify and mitigate these risks to safeguard your employees from everyday compactor hazards.

### Conducting Your Risk Assessment

Because compactors are used in a wide variety of industries and locations, not all businesses will face the same compactor risks. You must therefore conduct a risk assessment for the specific compactor hazards your business experiences. Start your risk assessment by addressing the following three elements:

1. **Compactor location** – Compactors are often positioned in remote areas, far away from frequent, direct supervision. Placing dangerous machines such as compactors in isolated locations can discourage operators from following proper safety precautions and prolong the time it takes to respond to an emergency. Without constant supervision in a central location, workers may be tempted to ignore certain rules or skip important steps that ensure their safety.
2. **Compactor uses** – All businesses use compactors for the same thing: compacting materials. But the materials they compact, and how they do it, differs from business to business. One business may only

need compactors to crush cardboard. Another may need them to bale hazardous materials such as steel shavings or aluminium sheets—or even asphalt. Determine all the ways your business uses compactors, and assess each one according to its level of risk. And do not forget to assess other activities that take place at the compactor, such as bin servicing and interactions with the public.

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3. **Compactor systems of work** – Many businesses have their own ways of managing compactor use. Monitor and assess your systems of work to determine whether they are effective. Are employees following your systems of work? Are your systems adequate to control the risk? Are measures effectively prohibiting unauthorised access? Your risk assessment should review the systems of work designed to protect compactor-operating employees. If you find the systems of work are ineffective, devise strategies to bolster them.

Your risk assessment should address the preceding three issues and anything else that could potentially harm you, your employees or members of the public. Tour your workplace, talk to your employees and scrutinise your systems of work—figure out the most dangerous aspects of compactor use at your business and how you can eliminate or reduce them. Remember

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to periodically undertake risk assessments throughout the year to ensure your measures for controlling risks are still effective.

## Identifying Your Hazards

Undertaking a thorough risk assessment should identify your business' various compactor hazards.

For example, your risk assessment may uncover the possibility that children and adult members of the public could gain unauthorised access to your compactor via a new, nearby walking trail. If these untrained members of the public then try to operate the compactor, serious injury or death could result for which you could be held responsible.

Many of the hazards you identify will be specific to your business, but some hazards will likely affect all businesses, including the following:

- Feeble or non-existent guarding for the compactor's dangerous moving parts
- Unsafe systems of work or lax safety regulations
- Inadequate isolation/lock-off procedures
- Unsafe blockage clearing protocols
- Inappropriate skip transfer processes
- Transport
- Fall from height
- Slips and trips
- Manual handling

## Controlling Your Hazards

After identifying your compactor-operating hazards, design measures to control them. Use the control measures listed below as a jumping-off point.

### Safe Site

- Situate compactors to avoid or minimise transport risks and unauthorised access.

- Surround your compactor with lockable fencing at least 2 metres tall to deter unauthorised access.
- Install adequate lighting near your compactor.

### Safe Equipment

- Guard all dangerous parts of machinery.
- Maintain all guarding that prevents access to the dangerous parts.
- Prevent unauthorised operation with effective electrical isolation, lockable controls and dedicated key operation.

### Safe Systems of Work

- Write a safe system of work for clearing blockages in compactors.
- Implement a permit-to-work system for granting access to any dangerous parts of compactor machinery.
- Choose a time during the day for skip transfer activities when the lowest number of people will be present.

### Safe Operator

- Allow only trained staff to operate compactors.
- Maintain signs and instructions for proper compactor use.
- Provide periodic refresher training.

## Strengthen Your Business

Without solid compactor risk management, you resign your business and its employees to a crushing fate. Rely on the insurance professionals at **Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd** to provide you with comprehensive risk management guidance that strengthens your business for years to come.



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