

## Large Wheelie Bins Not to be Manually Lifted

*The purpose of this Safety ALERT is to present the position of Brisbane Catholic Education with regard to the manual lifting of large (240 litre) wheelie bins.*

### Serious injuries have occurred

Several serious injuries have occurred whilst groundspersons have been manually lifting wheelie bins as part of school waste disposal procedures. The average time off from work for staff injured in this manner was 46 days. The average direct injury cost was \$4470. Recently a Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspector issued an improvement notice to a school in response to an injury that occurred while a groundsperson was lifting a large wheelie bin from the ground to empty it into an "industrial" bin.

### Why lifting wheelie bins is a risk

Wheelie bins were designed to be lifted and emptied by machines. Manually lifting wheelie bins is unsafe because:

1. their design generally does not allow a person lifting the bin to use a safe technique, for example, there is a lack of adequate handles to allow the person to get a secure grip; and
2. their capacity means that the total weight of bins will often exceed what the person can easily, and safely, manage. Check out the weights in the table at right.

#### Weight of large wheelie bins:

Empty:	14 kg
Full of paper, magazines, books etc.:	Up to 150 kg

### Position Statement on the manual lifting of large wheelie bins

**Brisbane Catholic Education's position on the lifting of large (240 litre) wheelie bins is that under no circumstances should waste disposal procedures include the practice of a person lifting a large wheelie bin, either empty or full, unassisted.**

**NOTE: "Lifting" means the person's body supports the total, or the greater part, of the weight of the bin and contents, if any, such that the base of the bin leaves the ground or floor. It does not mean pushing or pulling the bin.**

### Alternative waste disposal methods

The position on the lifting of large wheelie bins outlined above will require some schools to change their waste disposal procedures. As schools have varying waste disposal procedures to suit site-specific needs, it is not possible to prescribe a single replacement practice. However, examples of several alternative methods along with associated advantages and disadvantages are provided in the table overleaf.

## Action required to facilitate safe waste disposal practices

To ensure the Brisbane Catholic Education position statement on the manual lifting of large wheelie bins is adopted, managers/supervisors should assess current waste disposal practices. If these include the manual lifting of large wheelie bins, then it is essential that managers/supervisors:

- instruct relevant staff with regard to the position statement, and document such instruction;
- consult with relevant staff in the selection or trial of a suitable and safe alternative process; and
- assure staff that they have the support of their supervisor/manager during the implementation of new or trial processes, and that at no time are they expected to lift or move more than they can comfortably manage.

It is also possible that a change to waste disposal procedures will increase the time it takes to complete the task. This may be temporary until the new procedures are integrated into the work routine, or it may be permanent and should be accounted for by managers/supervisors in task allocation. It is acknowledged that this will cause a level of disruption, however, the outcome achieved will be a significantly reduced risk of injury to staff.

## Alternative Waste Disposal Methods

Waste disposal method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Notes
Using a hydraulic "bin lifter"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automatic lifting eliminates the need for a person to lift the bin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of bin lifter</li> <li>• Storage and maintenance of bin lifter</li> </ul>	
Routine curb side collection of wheelie bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminates emptying wheelie bins into "industrial" bin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A possible need for additional bins</li> <li>• Cost of collection service</li> </ul>	
Using plastic bin liners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminates the need to lift the bin as the liner is sealed and removed from the bin</li> <li>• Keeps bins cleaner and reduces the time required to clean them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of bin liners</li> <li>• The load may still be just too heavy for safe lifting to occur – may be overcome by using in conjunction with smaller bins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The removal of full bin liners can be difficult due to "suction" as the liner is pulled from the wheelie bin. This may be relieved by drilling several small holes in the side of the bin a few centimeters from its base to allow air in as the liner is removed.</li> </ul>
Using smaller bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While smaller bins will generally result in more bin handling, the smaller capacity reduces the potential load to be lifted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste disposal procedures may take longer to complete</li> <li>• Depending on the contents, the load may still be just too heavy for safe lifting to occur</li> </ul>	
Installing a ramp adjacent to the "industrial" bin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows wheelie bins to be pushed or pulled to the height of the industrial bin so that they contents may be tipped out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of building a suitable ramp</li> <li>• A steep ramp gradient will not allow a wheelie bin to be pushed/pulled easily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The gradient of the ramp should be as shallow as possible.</li> </ul>
"Team lifting" (minimum of two people)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces the total weight that a person must lift</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can often be undertaken incorrectly. Must be executed well to minimize the risk of injury</li> <li>• The load may still be just too heavy for safe lifting to occur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should only be considered a temporary measure until a more reliable method, such as one of those above, is implemented.</li> </ul>

## Further information and assistance

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