

4 November 2025

SafeWork NSW: Collection, transport and disposal of waste - Draft code of practice

NSROC – Feedback

Introduction

SafeWork NSW has recently issued for consultation the draft *Collection, transport and disposal of waste code of practice* (Code). The new Code will replace the 2005 Collection of domestic waste code of practice. Feedback has been requested via an on-line survey which closes on Sunday 9 November 2025. Feedback has been specifically requested to make sure the code:

- is relevant
- is easy to understand
- supports current and emerging work practices and technologies.

Based on our review, outlined below are the key issues and potential improvements NSROC has identified for the draft Code.

Issues and Recommendations

1. Clarify the Scope and Title of the Draft Code

Issue: The current title, *Collection, Transport and Disposal of Waste Code of Practice*, is misleading. While the title implies coverage of the full waste chain, under section *Scope and application* on page 4, the Code clarifies that it does **not** apply to landfill, recycling processing or waste treatment facilities—focusing instead on collection, transport, and unloading at transfer or storage facilities.

There are two Community Recycling Centres (CRCs) with the NSROC region, that are drop-off points for household problem waste (oil, paint, e-waste, batteries etc). Waste is stored temporarily and collected for off-site processing. No recycling or processing occurs on-site. On page 4, the Code states:

“This Code does not cover... recycling processing facilities e.g. transfer and storage.”

This wording is ambiguous, as CRCs function as temporary storage/transfer points not recycling processing facilities. We recommend:

- Amending the title to remove “*disposal*”, for example:
“Code of Practice: Collection and Transport of Waste”.
- Including a schematic/process diagram showing the Code’s “battery limits” from waste generation to unloading at transfer facilities or CRCs.
- Explicitly clarifying if temporary storage and drop-off points such as CRCs are included.

2. Contaminated and Specialised Wastes – In or out of Code scope?

Under *Scope and application* (page 4) the Code states “*This Code does not cover street sweeping, asbestos waste, specialised waste (liquids, sharps, sanitary waste),..*”

This appears to explicitly exclude asbestos, sharps, liquids, sanitary, and other specialised waste from the Code. However, Section 8 of the Code provides guidance on handling these materials (asbestos, biological waste including sharps, chemicals and other substances including liquids, fuels, and oils). This creates ambiguity as to whether the Section 8 controls are mandatory under the Code, purely advisory, and why they are included at all given the explicit exclusions noted on page 4.

We recommend the Code clarify if these contaminated/specialised wastes are covered by the Code, to ensure councils and contractors understand their legal obligations and WHS requirements. Eitherway, SafeWork NSW should consider referencing existing guidance from EPA and NSW Health on handling these materials during collection and unloading to support compliance with general WHS obligations.

3. Strengthen Controls for Lithium-Ion Batteries and “Hot Loads”

Issue: Li-ion batteries in household waste/recycling have repeatedly caused vehicle and transfer-station fires. The draft mentions lithium-ion batteries (sec 8.4) but does not set out sufficiently prescriptive controls for councils who contract collection and transfer station operations particularly related to unloading (e.g., containment for suspected hot loads, firefighting / suppression arrangements at transfer stations/CRCs, decontamination / remediation costs allocation).

Risk if not fixed — fire, injury, loss of vehicles, damage to transfer station infrastructure, contamination from firefighting water, extremely high clean-up and disposal costs can be prohibitive for most councils. Recent NSW and national reports show these incidents are recurring and costly.

Recommendations

- Require contractors to implement a **lithium-ion battery risk control plan** that includes: driver/loader training to identify suspect items, procedures for isolating and segregating suspect batteries on-truck or at transfer stations, and taped terminals where feasible before handling.
- Oblige transfer stations to maintain a **hot-load protocol**: immediate isolation of the vehicle/load, a designated fire-safe containment area (non-combustible tipping floor, bunding, non-airtight ventilated containers for battery storage), and a tested emergency response with Fire and Rescue NSW and contractor contacts.

- Require contracts to specify **cost allocation and escalation** for firefighting and hazardous disposal of battery fires (including treatment of firefighting water) so councils aren't left with unexpected liabilities.

We request that the Code recognise the cost burden on councils and contractor fleets of implementing enhanced lithium-ion battery risk controls discussed above. We suggest that the regulatory framework and associated battery stewardship scheme should include financial support mechanisms or incentives (grants, cost-sharing arrangements, or supplier-funded contributions) to ensure these essential measures are implementable and not cost-prohibitive for local government.

4. Define Minimum Safety Controls for Unloading and On-Site Operations at Transfer Stations and CRCs

Section 9 of the Code covers unloading at transfer/storage facilities, including traffic management, exclusion zones, and spotter supervision. We recommend:

- Explicitly confirming if CRCs are covered by the Code or not.
- Clarifying coverage of other on-site operations, including:
 - Temporary storage after unloading.
 - Movement of on-site vehicles (forklifts, trucks).
 - General worker safety beyond unloading (manual handling, slips/trips/falls, machinery use, loading vehicles).

Based on clarification of the scope, it would be very useful for operators at waste transfer, processing, and disposal facilities to understand which WHS codes apply to activities outside the scope of this Code. References to other relevant WHS codes should be provided within this document. This would ensure operators are aware of all the relevant WHS codes which apply to their operations and can provide comprehensive protection for workers and contractors.

5. Practicality of Eliminating Manual Handling in Bulky Waste Collections

Under Section 7 Bulk waste collections the draft Code states that risks should be controlled by *“eliminating the need to manually lift items by planning ahead and using fit-for-purpose mechanical devices (e.g. trolleys, vehicle loading cranes, tilt trays, pallet jacks).”*

While this approach is ideal in principle, in practice it is **not feasible** for many bulky household items (e.g. mattresses, wardrobes, cupboards, couches), where use of mechanical devices is impractical, time-consuming, or creates additional hazards in residential environments.

Recommendation: The Code should acknowledge that:

- **Manual handling** remains the most practical and safe method for many bulky waste items.
- **Safe work practices** should focus on risk minimisation, including:
 - Two-person lifts with correct techniques.
 - Task rotation to reduce fatigue.
 - Avoiding awkward postures or overreaching.
 - Using mechanical aids only where practicable (e.g., tail lifts for heavier objects).

Recognising the operational realities of bulky waste collection will make the Code more practical, achievable, and aligned with real-world council and contractor practices.

6. Duty allocation between councils and contractors — make consultation, supervision and verification obligations explicit in contracting context

While councils engaging private contractors are generally not the PCBU for waste collection and transport, councils retain responsibility for the safety of their workplaces (e.g., transfer stations, CRCs).

Recommendation: Include a checklist or guidance for councils to verify contractor WHS compliance at these sites. This supports safe operations and facilitates oversight, even if the council does not have direct legal obligations under this Code.