

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative
Report Synopsis

OIG Case #25-0004-I

Issued: March 5, 2024



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
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March 5, 2025

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse. The following synopsis is a condensed version of the full report provided to City management officials and does not contain all investigative information.

On June 5, 2024, the OIG received a complaint regarding the Department of Public Works (DPW) Bureau of Solid Waste (BSW). The OIG investigation began and continued throughout the summer and fall of 2024. During that time, the OIG released one management referral, and four reports related to the work conditions within the BSW. This report contains information that covers the overall work environment and experience of BSW employees at the Eastern Sanitation Yard (Bowley's Lane) and Western Sanitation Yard (Cherry Hill).

The OIG reviewed the total work experience of solid waste workers and drivers within DPW. The investigation identified numerous issues and concerns that require DPW leadership's attention and assistance from other City agencies. The issues and information uncovered are described in the five sections of the report:

- 1. Operational issues and concerns (Page 6)**
- 2. Injuries, discipline, and frontline supervision (Page 21)**
- 3. Safety and training (Page 29)**
- 4. Work resources, workplace culture, salaries, and hazards (Page 38)**
- 5. Investigative Findings & Recommendations (Page 45)**

The OIG interviewed more than 130 employees and found the adverse work environment and negative culture that has existed for the last decade create great concern for worker safety, morale, and general welfare. The majority of interviews occurred between August and October 2024. The OIG met with DPW leadership at various times during this investigation to update them on urgent situations. The OIG found the current DPW Director and his leadership team's cooperation and responsiveness to issues throughout the investigation noteworthy.

BACKGROUND

BSW contains six (6) divisions responsible for removing waste and keeping the City environmentally safe and sanitary pursuant to the City Charter, Code, and all other government regulations. Table 1 below details the six (6) divisions and some of their respective responsibilities. BSW currently has approximately 748 full-time employees within its division. Of that amount, 400 occupy laborer and solid waste worker positions, and 205 hold driver positions. According to Workday, the City's human capital management system, 355 employees are assigned to Bowley's and Cherry Hill.

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

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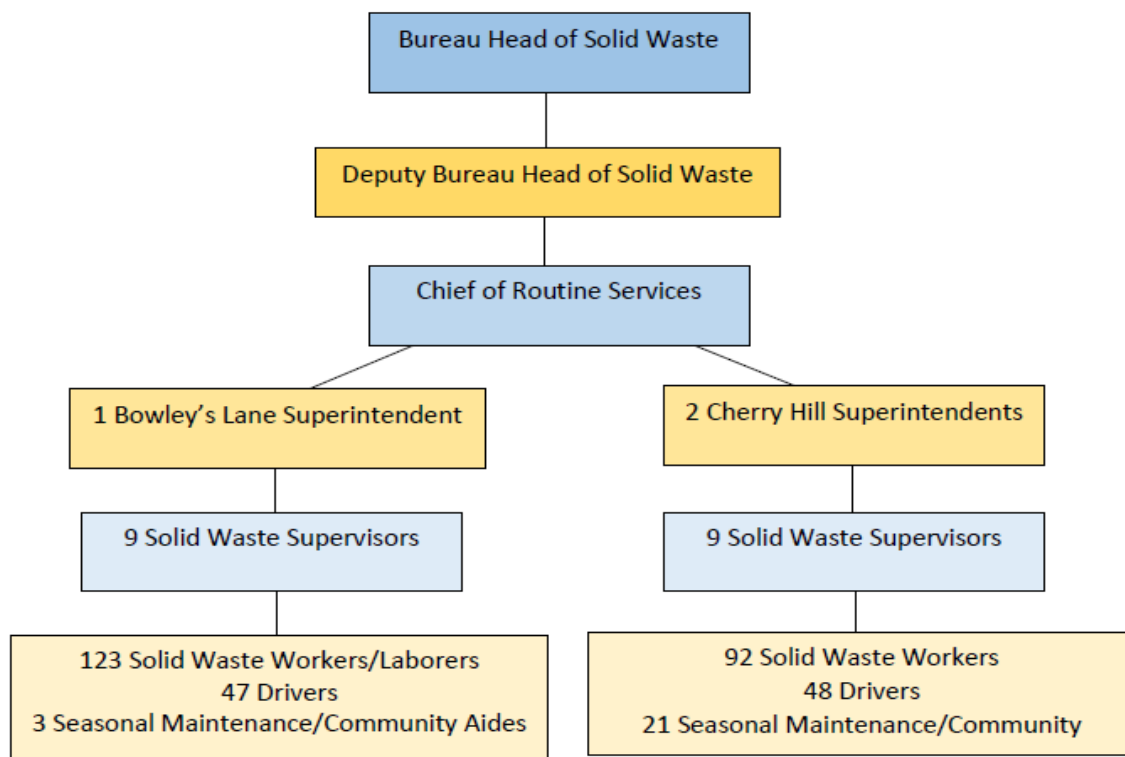
This public synopsis is only a summary of a more comprehensive report of investigation submitted to the appropriate City management official

Table 1: BSW Division and duties

Routine Services: weekly curbside trash & recycling collection including Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill, seasonal yard waste collection, Christmas tree collection.	Special Services: graffiti removal, dirty street & alley cleaning, bulk trash collection.
Property Management: Vacant property boarding, rat abatement, vacant lot mowing & cleaning	Environmental Services: Northwest Transfer Station operation, Management of the Quarantine Road Landfill (6100 Quarantine Rd. Baltimore, MD 21226)
Mechanical Street Sweeping: Mechanical Street Sweeping Operation, Drop-off center operations.	Inner Harbor and Special Events: Corner/park can collection, downtown cleaning, homeless encampment cleaning, special events trash and recycling.

Figure 1 below shows the organizational chart as it relates to employees within Routine Services.

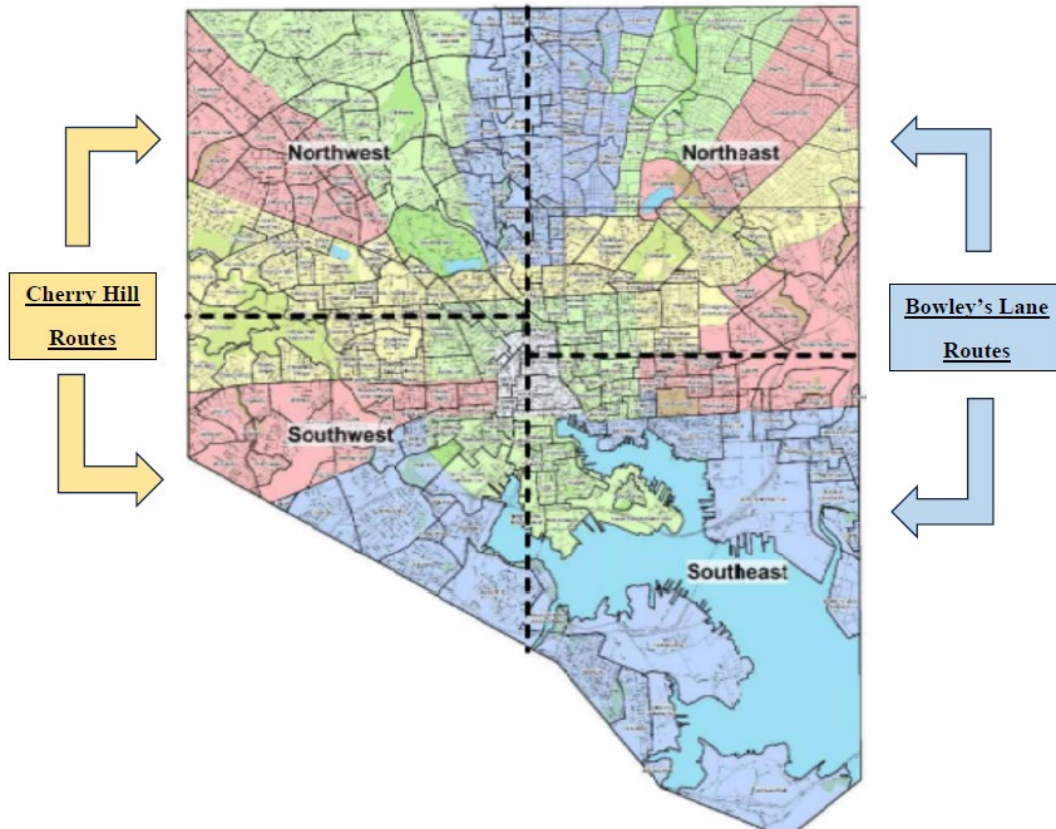
Figure 1: BSW Organizational Chart



While other divisions are affected by some of the issues outlined in the following report, this investigation was primarily focused on the workplace culture within Routine Services. Mixed refuse (Trash) and recycling collections are split into four (4) quadrants of the City that are served by two (2) locations. The western quadrants (Northwest and Southwest) are completed from the Cherry Hill yard (Cherry Hill), located at 700 Reedbird Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21225. The eastern quadrants (Northeast and Southeast) services are operated by the Bowley’s Lane yard (Bowley’s Lane), 6100 Bowley’s Lane, Baltimore, MD 21206 (Figure 2).¹

¹ Excerpt of map used from a 2019 DPW master plan.

Figure 2: Routine Services Quadrants



Employees from Cherry Hill and Bowley's Lane work four (4) days a week with ten (10) hour shifts from Tuesday to Friday. They complete their assignments on a "task-work" basis. In the task-work model, employees are assigned one route per shift, and their shift is considered concluded once the route is completed, regardless of whether the route takes four (4) hours or ten (10) hours. Any additional routes assigned would be considered overtime. For example, if a route begins at 6:00 a.m. and ends at 10:00 a.m., but the worker decides to pick up another route that ends at 2:00 p.m.; the worker will be paid for ten (10) hours of regular time and four (4) hours of overtime. The OIG learned that the task work system began under former City Mayor William Donald Schaefer to increase salaries for solid waste workers.

The OIG's investigation began on June 5, 2024, when a complaint was received that alleged DPW work conditions were dangerous for employees due to the heat. The complaint cited a lack of water and ice at Cherry Hill for 90°F days. After visiting Cherry Hill and workers on a trash route, the OIG found evidence to support the complaint and sent a [referral](#) to DPW management on June 20, 2024. DPW [responded](#) on June 26, 2024, noting that the main office trailer would be used as a cooling station, a temporary air-conditioning unit would be installed, Gatorade was being supplied, and moisture-wear t-shirts were ordered for extreme heat days.

After DPW's referral response, the OIG received additional complaints that prompted the OIG to visit Cherry Hill on July 10. That day, temperatures reached 95°F. When the OIG arrived, there was no evidence that ice or water bottles were delivered to the yard and made available to the early shift employees. Employees reported the day prior that water bottles were delivered to the yard in a trash can full of ice, but nothing that day. The ice inside the trash can was melted, and the water bottles were warm at 6:00 a.m. The air-conditioning in the main trailer that DPW had previously stated would be a cooling station had stopped working a few weeks before, and the thermostats read 83°F and 85°F before 7:00 a.m. An [emergency report](#) was issued a couple of hours later.

After receiving more complaints, the OIG visited nine (9) DPW facilities on July 16 and [published](#) the findings on July 23. The OIG investigation continued into the work conditions at Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill.

Former DPW Director Rudolph Chow was promoted to the director position in 2014 and retired in October 2019. Current Interim DPW Deputy Director Matthew Garbark was the Acting Director from February 2020 to April 2021. Former DPW Director Jason Mitchell resigned from the position effective June 30, 2023. Former DPW Deputy Director Richard Luna then became the interim director until current DPW Director Khalil Zaied was hired and started work on March 16, 2024.

METHODOLOGY

The OIG completed multiple site visits to Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill, as well as seven (7) other locations, over the course of the investigation, including during the summer and winter months. The OIG completed over 130 interviews during the investigation, including current and former solid waste employees. The OIG reviewed correspondence, vendor reports, policies, vehicle data, site design plans, financial documents, labor union agreements, and numerous other documents related to solid waste work.

Operational Issues & Concerns

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Facilities

The OIG’s prior investigative reports from the summer of 2024 detailed safety and facility concerns at nine (9) DPW buildings. At the solid waste yards, the OIG found the following during the July 2024 site visits:

- Bowley’s Lane: The HVAC system in hallways or locker room areas was not working, the trailer with air-conditioning was not being utilized, significant damage was present in locker room areas, and no toilet paper was provided in the men’s bathroom (Figures 3,5, &7). The OIG confirmed that toilet paper has remained in the stalls since DPW installed new toilet paper holders.

Since the OIG’s investigation began in June, DPW has made numerous improvements to both BSW facilities and provided updates on [July 26](#), [August 2](#), [August 9](#), and [August 16, 2024](#). At Bowley’s Lane, DPW installed toilet paper dispensers and made toilet paper available to employees, painted interior walls, repaired broken lockers, replaced flooring in two offices, installed new sinks, replaced locker room light bulbs, and installed two new kitchenettes (Figures 4,6, &8).

Figure 3: Before DPW improvements July 2024



Figure 4: After DPW Repairs August 2024

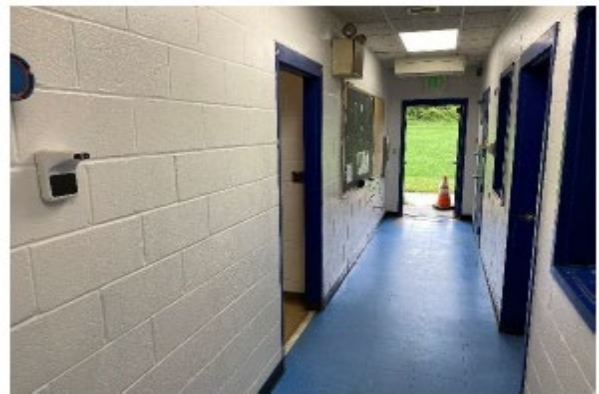


Figure 5: Before DPW improvements July 2024



Figure 6: After DPW Repairs August



Figure 7: *Before DPW improvements July 2024*

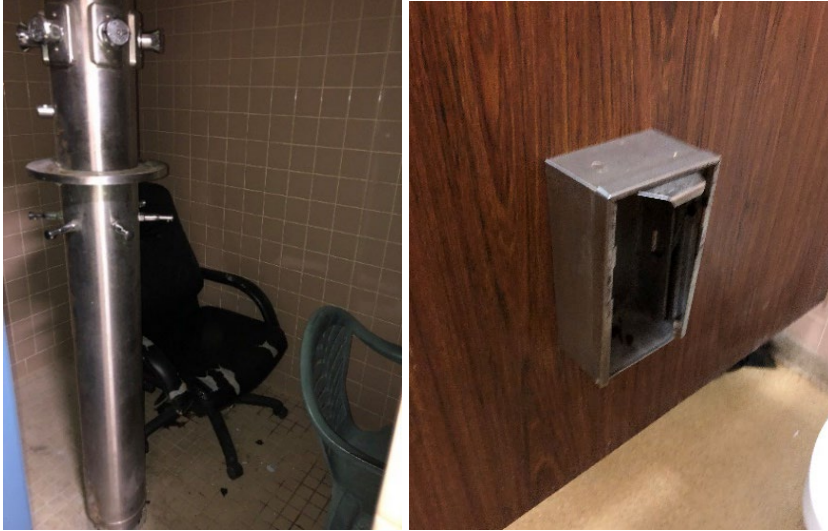


Figure 8: *After DPW Repairs August 2024*



- Cherry Hill: During July 10 and July 16, 2024, site visits, the OIG observed inoperable ice machines, HVAC system in the trailer or office areas was not working, missing floor tiles in the trailer, the a missing faucet handle in the men’s locker room sink, and numerous coolers were found in boxes not being used (Figures 9,11, &13).

At Cherry Hill, DPW repaired and installed ice machines, fixed the broken faucet, replaced furniture inside the locker room, installed new portable air-conditioning units, scheduled a deep cleaning, and installed electrical hardware in the administrative building to support additional air-conditioning units, among other repairs (Figures 10,12, &14).

Figure 9: *Before DPW improvements July 2024*



Figure 10: *After DPW Repairs August 2024*



Figure 11: *Before DPW improvements July 2024*



Figure 12: *After DPW Repairs August 2024*



Figure 13: *Before DPW improvements July 2024*



Figure 14: *After DPW Repairs August 2024*



These improvements were noted but the investigation continued, and additional information related to the poor work conditions and negative culture at Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill that employees have endured for years was found.

- Bowley’s Lane

Numerous DPW employees and management confirmed the disrepair and poor state of Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill, which have existed for a long time. Numerous witnesses stated they have been told that renovations were planned years ago but they never occurred. Witnesses stated that DPW waits too long to fix problems with the facilities, and witnesses consistently stated that prior management rarely visited the yards. It was described that the limited temporary improvements that have occurred over the years were “putting lipstick on a pig,” and a supervisor stated that there is an absence of initiative to enhance the facility conditions. Numerous witnesses expressed that work productivity is continuously prioritized over employee’s health and concerns.

According to the Maryland State Archives, the Bowley’s Lane property was purchased by the City from Baltimore County in 1927. The City operated a landfill at the site until it was closed in 1984. A sample of witness descriptions of the conditions at Bowley’s included²:

² These descriptions were based on the conditions prior to the OIG’s investigative reports, DPW’s responses and facility improvements during the late summer of 2024.

- The office smelled like a sewer and of fecal matter. A witness stated the odor existed up until three months ago and was told it was the smell of gas buildup at the facility.
- The poor facility conditions have existed for 20 years.
- One witness described a plumbing leak from the trailer occurring for three (3) weeks. The City’s contractor could not locate the shutoff valve. The witness stated they had a family member visit the facility, locate the shutoff valve, and turn it off.
- Several supervisors stated the lack of toilet paper was a response to toilet paper being stolen from the facility. However, since the toilet paper dispensers have been installed in the locker rooms, toilet paper has remained available to workers, and there have been no reports of theft.

Additionally, numerous workers expressed concerns about Bowley’s Lane facility being built on a closed landfill. Several witnesses described the smell of gas built up at the facility. They explained that the facility doors would need to be opened after the weekend to air out the smell. The OIG noted this and other concerns in a prior OIG report from 2019 ([Case #19-0047-I](#)). DPW [responded](#) at that time that they would be working with the Department of General Services (DGS) and contractors to schedule and identify funding for the repairs. Approximately five (5) years later, the health and safety concerns were still present when the OIG visited the site in July 2024. A DPW manager explained that they received advice from a plumber to pour water down an unused sink and locker room drains when a gas odor is detected. This manager also noted that Bowley’s Lane employees endured subpar conditions under the expectation that the building would be demolished and rebuilt, but that did not occur.

The OIG learned that in November 2024, DPW received a \$24,468 penalty at Bowley’s Lane from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) due to repeat issues of oil and trash in truck parking areas, oil-laden stormwater freely flowing into parking lot storm drains, scattered trash, missing stormwater visual reports, routine and annual site inspections, and employee training documents.

- Cherry Hill

According to an engineer’s renovation plans, the property at Cherry Hill was used as a waste incinerator or landfill until 1977. The site was added to the Maryland Superfund list in 1985, but MDE found no further investigation was required in 1999. The administrative building was constructed in 1962 and expanded in 2003, and an office trailer was added in 2011. Witnesses described the following conditions at Cherry Hill before to the OIG investigation and DPW’s recent improvements:

- Cherry Hill’s HVAC system does not function, and upper management does not respond about heating conditions because they do not have to endure it themselves.
- “Horrible” and “horrific.” When entering the locker room, you feel like you are about to have a heart attack. It is extremely hot in the summer and cold in the winter. DPW has not provided heaters previously. The urinals, sinks, and water fountains were broken.
- The HVAC system continually breaks every summer.
- Air-conditioning did not work in the locker rooms, toilets, and urinals were always broken, and employees would bring their own toilet paper.
- One supervisor stated the trailer at Cherry Hill was added in 2011 and was told it was supposed to be temporary because renovations would be occurring. However, the supervisor stated renovations never occurred.
- Supervisors stated workers do not know who to contact regarding the facility concerns.

The OIG learned that an engineering firm’s report dated March 2024, detailed HVAC, sink, missing tiles,

non-operational showers, and other issues, was provided to BSW leadership, including the former Bureau Head (Former Bureau Head). The damages were observed in the firm’s November 2023 visits to the site. The engineering firm noted that the primary goal of the memo was to identify minor repairs that could be completed by the summer of 2024 to keep existing buildings habitable while the design and the construction of major repairs occurred. The engineering firm added that it would be dependent on DPW’s schedule. However, the floor tiles, sink issues, and HVAC issues were still present during the OIG’s site visits in July 2024.

Regarding the facility conditions, the Former Bureau Head explained that he was taken aback by the poor conditions at the Kane Street facility³ and believed Bowley’s Lane lacked adequate indoor assembly space for the number of employees there. He explained his concerns waned when he learned of renovation plans, and the thought process was that the building would be replaced soon, so it created less need to replace smaller things around the site, like toilet paper holders. During his interview, he noted that Cherry Hill received approval to complete its floor repairs on August 28, 2024.

A review of total work orders reported to DGS between 2021 to August 2024 showed 85 requested work orders for Bowley’s Lane, and 124 requested work orders for Cherry Hill. Tables 2 and 3 below show the reoccurring problems found at each yard.

Table 2: Bowley’s Lane Requested Work Orders from 2021 to Present

Issue	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
HVAC	3	2	5	5	15
Electrical	3	2	2	4	11
Plumbing	1	6	10	11	28
Misc. (Carpentry, Flooring, etc.)	6	7	5	13	31
					85

Table 3: Cherry Hill Requested Work Orders from 2021 to Present

Issue	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
HVAC	7	9	5	7	28
Electrical	3	4	2	8	17
Plumbing	2	7	15	9	33
Misc. (Carpentry, Flooring, etc.)	4	10	6	22	42
					120

According to the work order records, 40 of the 79 work orders in 2024 were submitted after the OIG’s July site visits, including for some of the issues identified in the OIG reports.

ARPA & Facility Funding/Developments

The City received \$641 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding in 2021. The funds were provided to help with the response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including supporting public health, replacing lost revenue, investing in infrastructure, and supporting economic recovery, among other areas. According to DPW fiscal correspondence from 2021, DPW’s proposed projects were eligible for approximately \$138 million in ARPA funding, including \$28.9 million for safety, health, and

³ 111 Kane Street, Baltimore, MD 21224. DPW’s Mechanical Street Sweeping facility.

facility upgrades at BSW facilities (Table 4).⁴

Table 4: DPW Projects Eligible for ARPA Funding

Division	Proposed Project	ARPA Funding Requested
Bureau of Solid Waste (BSW)	BSW - Residential Drop-Off Center Upgrades for Visitor Experience and Safety Improvements	\$665,700
BSW	Modernizing Customer Service & Data Collection at NW Transfer Station and Quarantine Landfill	\$307,255
BSW	Safety & Health Upgrade at Cherry Hill and Bowley's	\$7,280,000
BSW	Safety & Health Upgrades at Quarantine Landfill	\$896,000
BSW	Safety & Health Upgrades at Sisson St. & Kane St.	\$8,817,200
BSW	Modern Facility for DPW's Inner Harbor Division	\$5,500,000
BSW	Modern Facility for DPW's Property Mgmt. Division	\$5,500,000
Bureau of Water and Wastewater (BWW)	SC-1028 Replacement of Sanitary Sewers in Gwynns Falls Sewershed	\$3,610,600
BWW	SC-985 Rehabilitation of the High Level Interceptor	\$37,095,581
BWW	SC-946R Improvements in the Jones Sewershed	\$4,680,000
BWW	WC-1258-Water Infrastructure Rehabilitation	\$9,327,155
BWW	WC-1290-Downton Area & Madison St. Water Main Replacements	\$10,919,479
BWW	WC-1292 Belair Rd. & Vicinity – Water Main Replacements	\$3,899,005
BWW	WC-1349 – Madison St. Water Main Rehabilitation	\$5,327,582
BWW	Backflow Preventer Installation Program	\$9,442,000
BWW	BR Admin Building Funding	\$5,000,000
BWW	Sampling Station Funding	\$980,000
BWW	Flowcam funding	\$297,400
BWW	Reservoir Forest Mgmt. Funding	\$1,093,539
BWW	Lime Feeders Funding	\$1,606,000
BWW	SDC7788 Seamon Ave Storm Drain & Step Pool Conveyance	\$905,444
BWW	Patapsco Avenue Drainage	\$11,620,800
BWW	SDC7768 Harris Creek Watershed Storm	\$4,169,020
Total		\$138,939,760

⁴ Mayor's Office of Recovery Programs informed the OIG there was concern of the stormwater and wastewater projects timeframe to expend the funds, and the decision was made that DPW would solicit grant funding through the Mayor's Office of Infrastructure Development.

According to the ARPA dashboard,⁵ DPW received \$15 million in ARPA funding for the projects displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5: DPW Projects Eligible for ARPA Funding

Project	Amount
DPW Capital and Operating Improvements	\$5.7 million
Purchasing of DPW Load Packers	\$5.1 million
DPW Waste Removal Contract – Vendor	\$3.3 million
DPW Recycling Crews	\$1 million
Total	\$15.1 million

According to DPW’s responses from August 2024, Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funding had been provided for Cherry Hill (\$8.1 million) and Bowley’s Lane (\$16.5 million) renovations. As of December 2024, DPW’s planned redevelopment of Cherry Hill is estimated to begin in July 2025.

The design plans for Bowley’s Lane would create a Transfer Station where the DPW trucks could drop off solid waste from their routes and then return to the route. This could increase efficiency and reduce the route completion times as trucks currently travel to the Landfill or Bresco incinerator, both located in the South Baltimore areas.⁶ According to a recent contractor estimate, the Bowley’s Lane Transfer Station project could cost nearly \$70 million, which is beyond the funding currently allocated. This has placed the transfer station plans on hold. While plans and alternative funding are being considered, DPW plans to renovate the current Bowley’s Lane administrative building for approximately \$380,000. This renovated administrative building would then be factored into any future site plans.

Operational Pressure and Priority Lists

During interviews, the OIG learned that there is an inherent pressure felt throughout the organization, including management and frontline workers, to complete the routes and address citizen complaints. DPW’s performance metrics in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) included the percentage of service requested completed within one day for recycling and trash and the percentage of missed pickups. Table 1 below shows that DPW only missed 0.2% of recycling pickups and 0.1% of trash in FY22 and FY23, with a target goal of 0.5% for FY25 (Table 6).

Table 6: DPW Performance Measures FY20-FY25

Performance Measures

Type	Measure	Fiscal 2020	Fiscal 2021	Fiscal 2022	Fiscal 2023	Fiscal 2024	Fiscal 2025
		Actual	Actual	Actual	Target	Actual	Target
Output	Tonnage Collected - Recycling	24,114	15,800	22,159	30,000	21,941	23,000
Output	Tonnage collected - Mixed Refuse	143,230	158,547	154,876	150,000	143,315	152,000
Output	% of SRs completed within one day (Recycling)	N/A	36.3 %	94.9 %	N/A	97.7 %	90.0 %
Output	% of SRs completed within one day (Mixed Refuse)	N/A	53.8 %	93.6 %	N/A	97.5 %	90.0 %
Outcome	% of Missed Pick-ups (Recycling)	N/A	0.1 %	0.2 %	N/A	0.2 %	0.5 %
Outcome	% of Missed Pick-ups (Mixed Refuse)	N/A	0.2 %	0.1 %	N/A	0.1 %	0.5 %

⁵ <https://baltopi.shinyapps.io/ARPA-dashboard/>

⁶ The Bresco Incinerator is not owned by the City and is located at 1801 Annapolis Rd, Baltimore, MD 21230

DPW receives numerous service requests and customer complaints throughout the service week, from Tuesday to Friday. Some result from a missed pickup, which is classified as a DPW error, or citizen error which occurs when the trash was not placed out before pickup occurred. Citizen complaints can be received from the City’s 311 service number or elected officials forwarding concerns from constituents. The OIG reviewed numerous complaints that DPW received from citizens. DPW supervisors noted that almost 50% of the time, these complaints result from citizens placing their trash out late after the pickup occurred.

The OIG learned that the Mayor’s Office of Performance & Innovation administers CleanStat meetings, where DPW’s targeted percentages for trash and recycling appear to be 0.14% and 0.10%, respectively (Figures 15-16).

Figure 15: CleanStat - Recycling

DPW **missed** the **Recycling** target in each of the past four weeks. Weekly recycling resumed on week of 3/3.

Week of	Recycling (Target: < 0.10%)				
	DPW Error	Citizen Error	Other		
3/24 - 3/30	0.11 n=231	32%	67%	1%	City Holiday 3/29
3/31 - 4/6	0.13 n=269	34%	61%	5%	
4/7 - 4/13	0.14 n=285	53%	47%	0%	
4/14 - 4/20	0.13 n=269	44%	56%	0%	

Data pulled from Salesforce via CitiStat SQL table 4/22/24. Reported missed collections out of 200K estimated households in Baltimore city.

Figure 16: CleanStat – Mixed Refuse

DPW **met** the **Mixed Refuse** target in three of the past four weeks.

Week of	Mixed Refuse (Target: < 0.14%)				
	DPW Error	Citizen Error	Other		
3/24 - 3/30	0.13 n=256	39%	57%	4%	City Holiday 3/29
3/31 - 4/6	0.14 n=288	36%	56%	8%	
4/7 - 4/13	0.13 n=267	40%	56%	4%	
4/14 - 4/20	0.12 n=247	31%	64%	5%	

Data pulled from Salesforce via CitiStat SQL Server 4/22/24. Reported missed collections out of 200K estimated households in Baltimore city.

The OIG learned that some of these missed pickups were placed on a “priority list” for supervisors. Supervisors are required to check these properties and take photos to ensure pickups are completed. Supervisors stated that some addresses stay on the priority list for months, requiring them to continually check on a property after the issue is resolved. A review of an August 2024 weekly priority list showed some properties were on the list from four and five months prior. This has been considered for change as a result of OIG discussions with the DPW administration.

Routes & Staffing

DPW workers expressed concern that the trash routes are long and are not evenly distributed. A DPW Superintendent explained that some routes are completed after five (5) hours, while others require nine (9) hours of work. Another DPW Superintendent stated that some trash routes are uneven in distance. They said that some trucks must go to the dump and drop off their load three (3) times per day, while others may only need to dump twice. The OIG learned that one of the routes requires four (4) trips to the dump and is rarely finished on time.

Drivers stated they have experienced long lines at times when dumping at the Quarantine Road Landfill located in Hawkins Point at 6100 Quarantine Road, Baltimore, MD 21226, or Bresco Waste Incinerator (Bresco), 1801 Annapolis Road, Baltimore, MD 21230. The City does not own Bresco but does own the Quarantine Landfill. Employees stated it would be helpful to have a dedicated lane for City workers when the Quarantine Landfill is busy. As mentioned earlier, when the future Bowley’s Transfer Station is fully funded and completed, it will give the ability for trucks to dump at the site and go back to the route rather than driving to the Quarantine Landfill or the Bresco.

A January 2022 report from Rubicon, the City’s sanitation route vendor, reviewed trash and recycling routes. Rubicon found the average number of trash stops per route from Tuesday to Friday collections to be 1,166. Figure 17 shows the table from Rubicon’s report regarding the average number of stops per route.

Figure 17: Rubicon Average Number of Trash Stops per Route

Current State: Trash			
	# of Routes	# of Stops	Average # of Stops/Route
Tuesday	45	50,097	1,113
Wednesday	45	56,375	1,253
Thursday	45	50,230	1,116
Friday	44	51,945	1,181
Weekly	179	208,647	1,166

According to Rubicon, the City’s trash routes are 20% larger on average than the industry standard of 950 stops per route. Rubicon also noted that 40% of the routes are larger than the City’s average route size, and 83% of City routes are above the industry standard of 950 stops per route. Furthermore, Rubicon wrote that the City’s service expectations are practically impossible to achieve.

Additionally, Rubicon noted in the January 2022 report that the City’s recycling routes at the time were

101% larger than the industry standard of 1,300 stops per route. Rubicon noted that the City averaged 2,608 recycling stops per day for weekly collection from October 2021 to March 2022 (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Rubicon Average Number of Recycling Stops per Route

Original Recycling Collection (Weekly)			
	# of Routes	# of Stops	Average # Stops/Route
Tuesday	20	49,736	2,486
Wednesday	18	51,880	2,882
Thursday	22	50,164	2,252
Friday	20	56,372	2,810
Weekly	80	208,152	2,608

The OIG learned that since the Rubicon report, DPW has implemented changes to the recycling routes for equalization but not for the trash routes. Multiple DPW managers expressed that the trash routes would benefit from re-evaluation, which DPW leadership plans to implement.

Additionally, supervisors and workers noted that recycling routes are disproportionate in some areas of the City. They stated Federal Hill, Locust Point, and North Baltimore have more recycling to collect than the West and East Baltimore routes. As a result, workers stated the routes take longer in the Federal Hill, Locust Point, and North Baltimore areas, while crews in East and West Baltimore are done sooner. Rubicon’s report did not address tonnage rates in specific neighborhoods of the City.

Unequal routes also impact overtime for solid waste workers and drivers. Daily overtime is worked after a crew’s task work is completed and they then work on another route. Regarding the equalization of overtime, the Local 44 MOU states that insofar as practical on each occasion, the opportunity to work overtime shall be offered to the employees with the least number of overtime hours first. Pursuant to the MOU, a record shall be kept and posted for each employee, showing the number of hours of overtime offered and declined.

According to BSW supervisors, overtime equalization charts are not maintained. A DPW Chief stated that if they followed the overtime equalization, they would never be able to finish their daily operations. DPW’s response to the OIG’s 2019 investigation explained that overtime is offered to the first crew that completes their route due to the time constraints for curbside collection. Trash routes that are studied may afford others more opportunities to work overtime if their routes are more equitable.

DPW has also experienced staffing issues within recent years. Since January 2021, 275 employees were terminated or resigned from Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill. According to a Workday report, there are currently 355 employees at Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill. Table 7 shows the number of terminations by position.

Table 7: Workday Terminations by Position

Position	Number Per Position
Solid Waste Worker/Laborer	143
Solid Waste Driver	49
Seasonal Maintenance Aide*	22
Community Aide*	23
CDL Drivers I&II	14
Solid Waste Supervisor	6
Operations Manager I	5
Solid Waste Superintendent or Asst. Superintendent	2
Misc. (Office Support, Admin. Analyst, Program Analyst, etc.)	11
Total	275

DPW supervisors and BSW leadership stated more staffing is needed to complete the routes, citing a lack of available employees when employees are absent or injured. To meet this crisis, DPW has had to use seasonal maintenance and community aides, who are temporary employees. The OIG learned that in 2020, City Council engaged with DPW and worked to have probation shortened for seasonal maintenance aides from two (2) years to six (6) months. However, this current crisis has caused the hiring of seasonal maintenance aides. DPW currently has 26 seasonal maintenance or community aides for Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill.

DPW began an emergency procurement contract with a waste management company (Waste Vendor) in October 2020 following a COVID-19 outbreak at Bowley’s Lane and has continued utilizing the contract due to staffing shortages. The initial 2020 contract stated the Waste Vendor would service four trash routes. The contract extension in October 2023 increased the number of the Waste Vendor’s routes to 17. From October 2020 to October 2024, the City paid \$5,123,220.75 in the Waste Vendor’s invoices.⁷ DPW cited understaffed crews and chronic staffing shortages due to daily employee callouts. The contract was established not to exceed \$4,230,000 with a 14-month term set to end December 31, 2025.

During the interviews, numerous workers expressed that they would like to see a return to picking trash up twice a week compared to the current once-a-week pickup. In 2007, DPW transitioned to a once-a-week trash pickup as weekly recycling pickups were added. The supervisors, drivers, and workers believed the routes during the twice-a-week model were not as long, and there were fewer complaints. If a trash pickup was missed early in the week, the resident knew that DPW would be returning later in the week. When questioned by the OIG, DPW executives explained that there are no plans to return to the twice-a-week trash pickup. They explained that the goal is to increase recycling through education and outreach so that there is less trash to be picked up.

Vehicles & Supplies

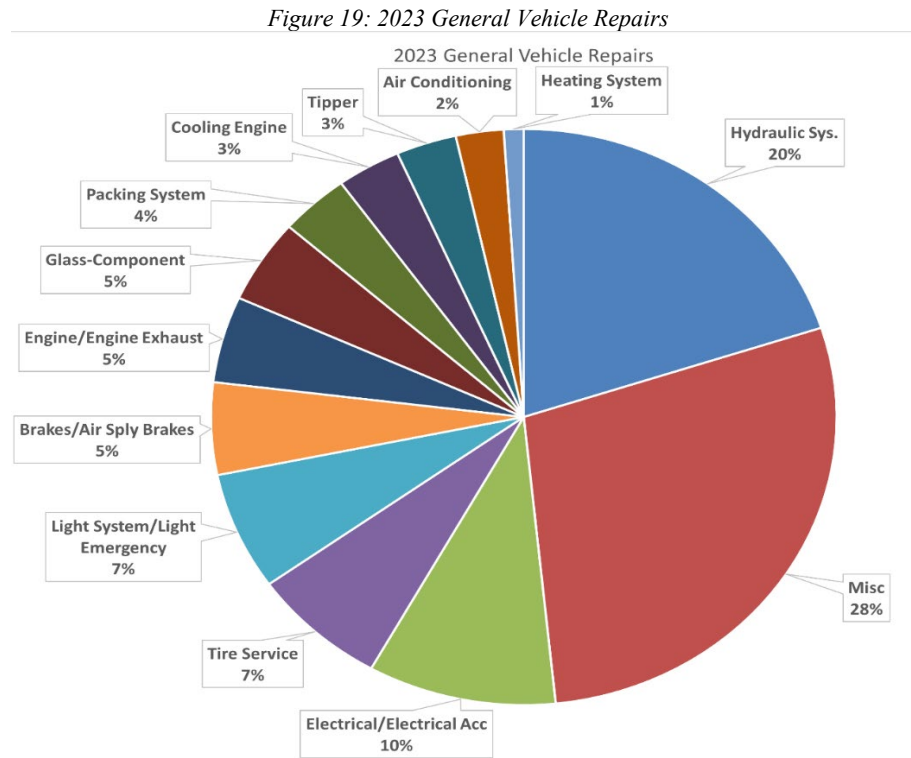
Numerous solid waste workers, drivers, and supervisors stated the City’s load packer trash trucks continuously have maintenance issues that impact work productivity and safety. Workers noted several issues on trucks that have occurred within recent years:

- Some trucks did not have air-conditioning installed.
- Broken or inadequate air-conditioning.

⁷ Some of the funds utilized for the Waste Vendor contracts are ARPA funds.

- The lifters or tippers on the back of the truck used to assist workers with dumping cans into the truck often do not work. Workers then lift the cans themselves to dump the waste into the truck.
- Shocks do not function well when going over bumps.
- Hydraulic issues
- Generally dirty
- There are holes in some of the vehicles that allow exhaust to enter the cabin area.

The OIG reviewed a repair order report from FASTER, DGS fleet management software, showing that from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023, 2,146 vehicles were sent for general repairs (Figure 19).



Additionally, in 2023, DGS completed 1,546 repairs classified as avoidable costs due to abuse of equipment, 374 quick service item repairs, 298 preventative maintenance services, and 294 road calls for service.

Numerous witnesses expressed concerns regarding the air-conditioning in the vehicles. According to witnesses, numerous vehicles had air-conditioning that was not working properly. Moreover, the OIG learned that some trucks in the BSW fleet were not equipped with air-conditioning. After the death of DPW Solid Waste Worker Ronald Silver II on August 2, 2024, DPW sent numerous vehicles to DGS for air-conditioning repairs, and additional repairs were found. A FASTER report showed DGS had 162 work orders for BSW vehicles from July 2024 to the end of September 2024 related to air-conditioning. Of the 162 work orders, 98 occurred in August 2024.

DPW’s solid waste drivers are responsible for completing a vehicle condition assessment before and after they drive a solid waste vehicle. DPW documents these assessments with pre-trip and post-trip checklists. Witnesses stated these inspection checklists are not done correctly. One witness said some drivers will let minor things go before something major is not working that requires repair. A driver stated during the first few months on the job, they were unsure how to fill out the checklist. Other witnesses explained that

workers have knowingly used unsafe vehicles. Witnesses described a shortage of trucks that resulted in some employees waiting in the yard until a truck became available to begin their route, which the OIG observed during the visit. It was reported that employees sometimes complete some maintenance for the vehicle themselves.

The OIG reviewed an asset inventory snapshot report from FASTER of Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill trucks from July 2023.⁸ There were 89 trucks listed in the inventory, and the average model year was 2016, so the average vehicle was seven (7) years old at that time. A snapshot report from November 2024 showed 133 trucks with an average model year of 2020 or an average vehicle age of four (4) years. This decrease is a marked improvement. A DPW executive attributed the influx of newer vehicles to the ARPA funds received and noted it was an area of focus for the former DPW director.

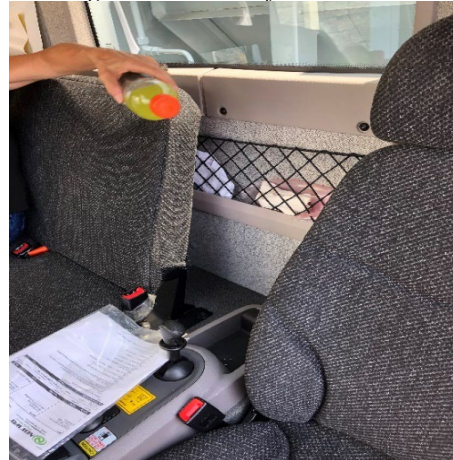
While BSW added new vehicles to the fleet, some noted delays occurred due to the process of wrapping vehicles with DPW’s design. In mid-July 2023, the Former Bureau Head inquired if any load packers were ready for the next week. DGS responded that the wrapping process would delay their availability but noted they would be ready by the end of July if not wrapped. The Former Bureau Head responded that he did not want to skip that process as it was important for branding DPW’s new image. The Former Bureau Head stated that he believed the wrapping process was important because he was trying to change the culture, and it was a way to show a change of status quo and take pride in their vehicles. Several DPW supervisors stated the wrapping process was not important as trucks were needed to replace older vehicles, and trucks could be returned for wrapping later.

The OIG visited vehicles at the Department of General Services’ Biddle Street Garage and viewed trucks from various years at different stages of the vehicle life cycle. The interior seating areas in the new trash trucks are smaller, and there is very limited space for water or ice coolers. The area behind the seats in the newer trucks had considerably smaller available space than the older trucks (Figures 20-21).

Figure 20: Interior of *older* truck



Figure 21: Interior of *newer* truck



DGS fleet personnel stated that custom fitting space on the outside of the truck for a cooler could void the vehicle warranty. Nonetheless, DGS fleet personnel reviewed the space inside during the OIG site visit and discussed potential solutions for creating cooler space within the vehicle for the workers.

DGS personnel explained that the measurements of City trash trucks are well-known in the industry and

⁸ This information was derived from the FASTER software.

designed with the City's tight alleyways in mind. These are called "Baltimore Alley Specs" in the industry. Solid waste employees described the challenges they face navigating narrow alleys. They explained that trees from resident properties, illegally dumped trash, and other debris sometimes create obstacles in the alleys. DPW supervisors stated that in the past, the City's forestry division⁹ would assist with trees obstructing the alleyways. Workers explained when trucks are unable to drive down an alleyway, they have to pull the trash bins from each residence to the end of the alleyway to dump the trash into the truck. They then return the bins to each residence. This process lengthens the time of their task.

Equipment

Early in the investigation, numerous workers expressed concern with the long-sleeved uniforms that BSW planned to purchase for the winter months. Specifically, they explained the buttons on the front of the shirt presented a potential safety hazard as the buttons could get caught on a truck or something else. According to DPW supervisors and other BSW leadership, the Former Bureau Head did not seek feedback regarding the uniforms from the laborers. Lack of input from the workers doing the job was a continued complaint raised throughout the investigation.

Numerous workers stated they have experienced delays in receiving uniforms, gloves, or boots. On December 3, 2024, the OIG conducted a site visit to Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill. The day's temperatures began at 27°F and were in the 30°F-range throughout the morning.¹⁰ Numerous workers were seen without uniforms. Some who had been with DPW past their six-month probation period stated they had never received a winter jumper or gloves.

The investigation also revealed that the Former Bureau Head purchased heated jackets for workers for the winter months. A DPW invoice showed that 676 heated jackets were ordered for \$82,134, equating to \$121.50 per jacket. A witness reported that the battery pack for the jacket only lasts for a short time. The OIG inspected the jacket and observed that the battery pack's power lasted two hours while the jacket was on the high heat setting, which would be needed in extreme cold temperatures. The hood of the jacket was also not insulated. Furthermore, the manufacturer's product information notes that the jacket's battery pack is not waterproof, and the heating feature and battery pack should not be used if the jacket gets wet. The OIG found numerous battery pack options available on the internet that have longer-lasting capabilities and may be compatible with the jackets ordered.

Numerous workers and supervisors interviewed stated they only receive work boots once a year and believe there is a need to receive new boots two or three times a year. One worker explained that they walk 30,000 steps a day on their route. A worker lost the sole of their shoe while working in an alley because of wear and tear. The supervisor explained that the worker had to duct tape the sole and shoe back together. Workers reported buying their boots due to wearing through their City-issued boots. Additionally, multiple workers noted they do not receive protective equipment like safety goggles.

⁹ <https://bcrp.baltimorecity.gov/forestry>

¹⁰ <https://www.wunderground.com/history/daily/us/md/glen-burnie/KBWI/date/2024-12-3>

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Injuries and Injury Process

From 2019 to 2024, BSW employees have reported 1,627 injury claims to the City’s third-party worker’s compensation contractor (Worker’s Comp Vendor), averaging approximately one claim per workday (Table 8).¹¹

Table 8: DPW Information from The Worker’s Comp Vendor Injury and Death Claims 2019-2024

Year	# of Injuries	# of Deaths	Total Paid for Worker’s Compensation Claim
2019	283	1	\$3,473,746.24
2020	286	1	\$2,545,305.60
2021	325	2	\$4,098,428.14
2022	207	0	\$2,748,321.70
2023	233	0	\$1,996,393.67
2024	293	2	\$1,448,750.76
Total	1,627	6	\$15,209,946.11

In 2024, 154 of the 293 injuries were employees from Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill. Of the 154 injuries, the Worker’s Comp Vendor documented that 41 were diagnosed as sprains, strains, or tears, 19 lacerations, 18 contusions, and 17 inflammations. Additionally, 11 of the 12 heat-related illnesses were Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill workers. Regarding the cause of injuries, the Worker’s Comp Vendor noted that 31 resulted from motor vehicle accidents, 29 from overexertion, 13 from contact with foreign material or sharp objects, and 13 from slips or falls.

In addition to employee descriptions of working through heat-related illnesses, numerous employees expressed concern with how other injuries were handled when they occurred. Many employees stated that if an injury was not reported the same day, they were told they would face disciplinary action, including suspension. During subsequent interviews, multiple supervisors confirmed that an employee would face disciplinary action if an injury was not promptly reported the same day it occurred. For example, the OIG learned of an instance when an employee chose not to receive treatment at the City’s contracted occupational health clinic provider (Health Clinic) for an injury that occurred at work one day prior to the employee reporting it. This is because a supervisor stated that going to the Health Clinic would result in a suspension since the employee did not report the injury the day it occurred. Some of the employee’s absences have resulted from appointments with a personal doctor. The employee added that the City’s response to injuries feels like punishment.

The City’s Deputy Chief of Risk Management explained that employees will have back strains and sprains when doing routine work. The Deputy Chief of Risk Management confirmed the employee’s right to report these injuries. During their interviews, DPW leadership stated that no one should be suspended for reporting an injury the next day, and injuries should be reported to the Worker’s Comp Vendor for them to determine the validity of the claim. The OIG learned there are no written standard operating procedures (SOPs) within DPW for injuries. A DPW HR Manager stated they have been begging for a standard operating procedure on reporting injuries for years because there are instances when employees get injured and say that they are fine, go home, come back the following day, and report the injury. The DPW HR Manager stated there is an issue because once you leave the “crime scene,” no one knows what you are doing. The DPW HR Manager emphasized protecting DPW, not with lies but with facts. They believe that

¹¹ This number is from a spreadsheet that DPW provided from the Worker’s Comp Vendor and represents the injuries filed by all BSW employees, including Cherry Hill and Bowley’s Lane.

a policy should incorporate discipline for injuries that are not reported.

The City's Administrative Manual 204-10 Job-Related Injuries and Illnesses policy states that delays or failures by employees and supervisors to report a job-related injury or illness, complete the employee incident report (EIR), or contact the Worker's Comp Vendor, shall result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. However, OSHA provides guidance regarding disciplinary programs, stating that employers must not use disciplinary action or the threat of disciplinary action to retaliate against an employee for reporting an injury or illness. Moreover, they give an example of an employee twisting their ankle at work but not immediately reporting the injury because it is not sore or swollen. The employee reports the injury the next day, and the employer disciplines the employee for failing to report the injury "immediately." OSHA concludes that this violates OSHA Rule 1904.35(b)(1)(iv) by disciplining the employee because it fails to account for injuries building over time, and taking adverse action against an employee constitutes a pretextual disciplinary action, which is also prohibited.¹²

Numerous employees shared their concerns about how DPW handled injuries:

- One employee shared that they experienced a medical emergency but supervisors did not document or report the injury. The employee met the workers on the route that day and did not start the day at the yard. During the investigation, the OIG learned it is not uncommon for workers to meet their driver on the route. The employee said when they arrived at the truck that day, they began experiencing a medical issue. The OIG confirmed with a DPW HR manager that the supervisor never completed an EIR. The HR manager explained that an EIR should have been completed, and the coverage determination should have been left to the Worker's Comp Vendor. Instead, the employee was hospitalized and lost months of pay. An EIR was never completed, and the OIG reviewed the records and will continue the investigation.
- Another worker explained that a Solid Waste employee was injured by a trash truck and workers expected them to finish the route before seeking medical attention. The injury was reported to supervisors at the end of the route. Instead of taking the employee directly to the Health Clinic, supervisors reportedly took the employee back to the accident scene and demanded the employee show them how the injury occurred.
- A solid waste worker reported their face and shirt were burned when an unknown object blew up in the trash area of the truck. They waited for a supervisor to come to the scene, but they returned to the yard because the supervisor was taking too long. A supervisor then drove them to the clinic to be examined.
- A worker contacted the OIG with concerns related to their return to work. They were going through what is known as the "options" process. The Health Clinic stated the employee would not be able to return to his job due to the lasting impact of the injury, while the employee's personal doctor said he was able to return to work without restrictions. When those circumstances occur, employees are presented with a letter containing four (4) options, including retiring, searching for another job within the City, or protesting the Health Clinic's decision by submitting to an independent medical exam. The employee stated a supervisor met him while he was working on the street. The supervisor gave him the letter and had a union representative on the phone. The employee stated he was told he needed to read the letter and make his decision at that time. The

¹² <https://www.osha.gov/recordkeeping/modernization-guidance>

employee reported that he did not have enough time to make his decision. He expressed that he wished he had selected a different option than he did then. The Office of the Labor Commissioner expressed they would be willing to work with DPW to review the letter to see if it can be revised to be easier to understand.

According to the Health Clinic's contract with the City, its physicians are expected to examine the employees to determine if they can perform modified duty or full duty work and it is expected that the provider will render independent medical opinions. Several workers stated they did not believe they received a proper, physical evaluation during follow-ups with the Health Clinic's physicians at the patient services clinic. The OIG spoke with some workers before and after their appointments and noted the appointment times were brief. The Inspector General was on the phone with one employee who ended the call because the doctor arrived. The employee then called the Inspector General back within a minute stating the doctor had evaluated them with no physical exam. The Inspector General contacted a Senior DPW Leader, who arranged for a second appointment for a thorough evaluation. However, the doctor brought the employee in and had a ten (10) minute conversation about how the injury process works, but he did not physically evaluate his condition. This resulted in a third visit to the Health Clinic for the employee for a physical evaluation.

Employees said the Health Clinic's doctors do not answer their questions or conduct any physical evaluations. They are then told they can return to work on light duty, but the Health Clinic's discharge instructions also instruct the employee to follow their personal doctor's guidance, which sometimes conflicts with the Health Clinic's light duty determination. In these situations, employees use their own leave time, and if there is no leave time, they are forced to take leave without pay, which creates financial hardships due to the DPW salaries.

Follow-up appointments for injured employees only occur downtown at the Health Clinic. Several injured employees expressed that they use public transportation to attend their follow-up appointments, which can be taxing while recovering from an injury. Witnesses explained that patient health services vendors for other employers have numerous locations throughout the metropolitan area that provide convenient locations for employees to be seen.

The Health Clinic's Medical Director for Patient Services stated that the Health Clinic reviews the employee's personal physician's notes and makes observations of the employee's capabilities. They stated they seek a conservative approach, which will sometimes result in light duty being offered. The Health Clinic noted that a City agency may not have light duty options for all workers, and if light duty is not available, the City agency has the discretion to place the employee on accident leave instead of light duty.

In a job field with many hazards and injuries, light duty opportunities for most solid waste workers are often not at Bowley's Lane or Cherry Hill. Rather, light duty opportunities may be at the landfill or other solid waste locations. The City's injury policy notes supervisors should work with their agency's HR to provide light duty work. Based on employee and supervisor interviews, there does not appear to be a light duty program for solid waste workers. Creating an established program with SOPs could be helpful in returning employees to work and resulting in less confusion and the perception of favoritism among the workers. The Society for Human Resource Management states that employers that have light duty or return-to-work programs should develop a written policy, a bank of light duty positions, a light duty form specifying the task and an employee's acceptance or refusal of light duty, designate a light duty coordinator, and communicate the policy.¹³

¹³ <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/how-to-guides/how-to-create-return-to-work-light-duty-program>

The correspondence reviewed also showed confusion between DPW management and DPW HR regarding when employees should be placed on light duty and what jobs would be available.

Performance Evaluations & Discipline Process

Numerous DPW employees reported they do not receive performance evaluations regarding their work performance. The OIG requested the performance evaluations for seven (7) solid waste employees, 17 supervisors, and two (2) superintendents from Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill from 2022 to the present. DPW stated that none of these employees had performance evaluations on file. According to DPW, performance evaluations were previously encouraged, but the practice and culture of conducting regular evaluations were not consistent across all employee groups within the agency. The new DPW administration said they are now collaborating with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to ensure participation and compliance with the evaluation process moving forward.

According to the City's Civil Service Rules, Rule 40 establishes standards of conduct and performance. Rule 41, Performance Evaluations, states that municipal departments shall keep such records as specified in the regulations regarding the performance, output, and conduct of employees in each class to which the standards established in Rule 40 apply. Additionally, it states that each appointing office shall make periodic reports covering the performance evaluation for each employee. Positive ratings will be given for the character, quantity, and quality of work performed and deductions from positive ratings will be made for all irregularities or delinquencies in conduct, attendance or other aspects.

Supervisors at Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill are City Union of Baltimore (CUB) employees. According to their contract agreement, any year when a CUB employee does not receive an evaluation, their performance will be considered "satisfactory."

Employees and supervisors described the disciplinary process for workers. Many employees said that write-ups and discipline are either retaliatory or are done inconsistently due to favoritism. Employees said that when they reported unsafe driving about a driver or requested to be placed with another driver, supervisors verbally chastised them. Workers were also concerned about being written up for failing to complete a route, which led to some not reporting illnesses to their supervisor. They also expressed that supervisors do not discipline for callouts, lateness, being out of uniform, and other issues consistently. Some workers will receive write-ups, while others receive no discipline for the same issue, creating perceptions of favoritism.

Supervisors claimed that if an employee feels unwell, they will not be written up. They stated they could take the employee to the Health Clinic, or the employee's time would be stopped, and they could go home for the day. Supervisors confirmed that the write-up process is based on callouts, lateness, being out of uniform, and other issues. Some supervisors acknowledged that write-ups are not done consistently. One supervisor explained that due to staffing issues, they are happy that a worker shows up at all and, therefore, will not discipline them for being late.

The OIG reviewed disciplinary records, and numerous write-ups occurring because of callouts, which are also referred to as "occasions." According to the City's attendance standards, an occasion is any period of continuous unscheduled leave for the same reason not covered by Family and Medical Leave, Liberal Leave, or counted as an emergency absence. Scheduled leave must be approved in advance by a supervisor. An unscheduled absence must be for at least half the workday/shift before it can be counted as an occasion. It should be noted that an employee has ten (10) days grace before receiving an occasion

for attendance. Pursuant to the policy, employees are allowed three (3) emergency absences per year that will not count as an occasion of unscheduled leave.¹⁴ The policy states that after five (5) occasions within a one-year period, an employee will be suspended for three (3) days. On the seventh (7th) occasion, the supervisor will recommend the employee for termination. The OIG learned that solid waste workers receive 40 hours of safe and sick leave, and three emergency days. A DPW executive also noted that workers have an additional three occasions before receiving a write-up.

Some employees and supervisors expressed confusion regarding the progressive discipline attached to the number of occasions. Employees expressed hesitation to call-out when they are sick and will instead come to work regardless of illness. They claimed that even with a doctor’s note, the absence is still classified as an occasion. The OIG spoke with multiple workers who stated they may have to take a day off after working in the heat or other illnesses to properly rest from working the day before. Due to the physicality, health risks, and hazards of the job, DPW should schedule an equity review of the occasions process and conduct refresher training for employees and supervisors, so they have a clear understanding of expectations.

Frontline Supervision

Solid Waste supervisors are responsible for numerous duties and responsibilities that impact workers, including, but not limited to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating vehicle and personal accidents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling injuries & incident reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary measures and conversations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling safety issues and concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling vehicle maintenance issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying problems & recommending solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively responding to problems/crises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing light duty assignments

Numerous witnesses stated that supervisors are dismissive of employees, have bad attitudes, speak negatively, and lack care or concern toward employees. These behaviors are supported by the issues that witnesses have reported throughout the investigation regarding:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of concern for employee safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improper response to injuries & illness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent/Perceived retaliatory discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of de-escalation & conflict mgmt.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not informing upper management of issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwillingness to assist workers

The investigation revealed the weakest level of management is the supervisory level at the solid waste yards. The OIG learned there is a lack of training when employees are promoted to supervisors. When issues or crises occur, the lack of training becomes apparent. Throughout the investigation, employees described instances of numerous supervisors either not knowing how to respond to or mishandling injuries, heat safety concerns, and other general employee concerns. Additionally, witnesses said that alcohol and drug use within the facilities occurs among workers and supervisors. These witnesses expressed concern for employee safety, noting that impairment could result in accidents or serious injuries.

¹⁴ Employees must use vacation or personal leave to cover these absences.

Multiple supervisors noted that everyone's management styles are different when it comes to employee interactions and discipline. A respected supervisor told the OIG that he tries to meet the workers at their level of needs and speaks with them when issues come up to see if there is a solution. The supervisor stated that DPW needs to better understand the workforce it hires.

A senior manager noted that many workers are hired on a second-chance basis and, during their probationary period, are particularly vulnerable as they cannot afford to lose their jobs, which could be seen as a violation of their probation. Many of these workers endure mistreatment to stay employed. Many of these employees will not seek assistance from their supervisor again if they have an initial negative interaction. An employee noted that workers cannot go to DPW HR with their concerns because DPW HR will contact the supervisor directly, and the situation will not improve. A union representative noted that supervisor treatment is one of the most common issues solid waste workers complain about. They said the culture of DPW supervisors is "do what I say now." Nonetheless, the union representative noted that Local 44 does not get involved in those complaints unless there is a contract violation. The representative said they have seen discipline overturned City-wide because supervisors did not follow all the disciplinary steps.

From interviews with supervisors and employees, it appears there is a lack of supervisors attempting to de-escalate issues and navigate difficult conversations with employees. Supervisors described disagreements with employees that lead to write-ups and discipline. Supervisors expressed during their interviews that they had not received supervisory training and would be willing to attend supervisor training or leadership development. When asked what issues needed to change within DPW, supervisors identified the need for more training, more employees, more vehicles, a designated counselor for DPW, and higher salaries for workers and drivers.

Supervisors also expressed an unwillingness to seek promotion to Superintendent. They explained that moving to a superintendent role would change their union and classification from CUB to the Managerial and Professional Society of Baltimore, Inc. (MAPS). With that change, they would lose the ability to obtain overtime pay and only receive non-monetary compensation.

Supervisors and employees stated that communication is key to DPW operations running effectively. During their interviews, supervisors said they either had their employee's phone numbers or their employees had their phone numbers. However, these statements proved untrue. During the investigation, the OIG requested that DPW supervisors provide the phone numbers of their employees due to the health benefit crisis. The DPW Chief could only collect 103 employee phone numbers from the supervisors. This is less than half of the workforce at Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill. The lack of phone numbers for employees indicates a communication gap between supervisors and employees.

Distrust of HR & Management

Many workers expressed reservations about taking complaints and concerns to DPW's HR team or Management due to fear of retaliation or lack of resolution. Other workers expressed a lack of clarity or negative interactions with DPW's HR team. The OIG learned that DPW created a tip line for employees to report complaints anonymously.

At the onset of this investigation, the OIG notified DPW of protected whistleblower activity for witnesses' participating in the investigation. Several workers reported issues involving DPW's HR team during the investigation. One worker did not receive the proper medical paperwork that their personal doctor needed

to complete. However, DPW HR did not provide the form and claimed the employee had failed to return it to HR. The Inspector General reviewed the documentation at the worker's request and informed DPW HR that they had not sent the form to the doctor or employee. DPW HR acknowledged that the form was not included in the worker's initial packet they provided to the doctor.

Other workers reported negative interactions with a DPW HR Manager. Witnesses reported that in these interactions, they did not feel that the DPW HR Manager listened or addressed their concerns, and some stated the DPW HR Manager spoke in a disrespectful tone towards them. In a DPW fatality case, the Inspector General spoke with the DPW HR Manager concerning the condition of an employee who worked with the deceased employee. The DPW HR Manager was dismissive concerning the employee's traumatic experience. In a prior fatality case, the DPW HR Manager said they allowed witnesses two (2) days to recover from the fatality even though they requested a longer time.

The OIG learned that the DPW HR Manager requested the Worker's Comp Vendor to complete surveillance on an employee after the worker's compensation claim had been closed. The employee had withdrawn the claim. However, the DPW HR Manager inquired if the Worker's Comp Vendor could do surveillance if no claim was filed. The Worker's Comp Vendor responded they could if requested. The DPW HR Manager requested that they do so. The surveillance cost was \$2,500 and yielded no substantial results per the investigative report.

The DPW HR Manager and the Worker's Comp Vendor's actions appear to have been an unnecessary cost and not in accordance with the City's Worker's Compensation Administrator contract. The contract states that activity checks or surveillance can be pursued at the direction of the City's Worker's Compensation Division in the Law Department. Moreover, the lack of an open worker's compensation claim could be a misuse of a vendor's services, create an appearance of retaliatory actions, and potentially encroach on an employee's right to privacy.

Training & Safety

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Onboarding and Job Training

Throughout the BSW, supervisors and employees stated there is a lack of training provided to new solid waste workers and drivers. They stated they did not receive onboarding training other than the new employee orientations when they began. DPW HR stated that there is a new hire orientation that lasts for two (2) days. The first day involves completing paperwork, while on the second day, employees receive their workday passwords and other technical information. DPW HR said there is a voluntary culture camp series where HR meets to check in with new employees at 30, 60, and 90-day intervals. However, they stated that solid waste workers often do not return for the check-ins even though supervisors are informed of the Tuesday meetings. The essential duties of the solid waste workers do not allow them to leave the routes to attend meetings during the workday.

Solid waste workers typically described the training they received as on-the-job training. A common phrase used to explain the training process was that DPW “just throws you on the back of a truck.” A supervisor said DPW needs to provide comprehensive onboarding training for workers and drivers instead of immediately expecting them to commence their duties without proper preparation. Many workers stated there are nuances to being a solid waste worker on a truck. For example, they stated there are specific ways to hold onto the truck while riding on the side; otherwise, a bump may throw you from the truck. Several workers said the experienced workers they were paired with on the first day did not explain how to do the job and were more focused on completing the route due to the task-work concept. One employee stated that employees need to be trained on how to use the tippers, the practical distance to determine whether a trash can is out for collection, and how to put the cans back correctly.

Numerous witnesses stated they do not believe that new employees understand the work duties before they are hired. Several employees stated that they have seen new employees not return after the first day or first few days of employment. Numerous supervisors stated that they would like to have someone with solid waste experience as a part of the interview process so that the job duties can be fully explained. New hires would then be prepared and know what to expect on a typical workday. A superintendent did provide a topic checklist that they reported to review with all new hires.

When hired, the OIG learned that solid waste drivers attend a class at the DGS Biddle Street Garage. However, many drivers and workers noted that drivers do not receive any hands-on training teaching them how to drive the trucks through the City’s tight alleyways. Solid waste drivers said they learn their routes by driving them on their initial workdays. Drivers and workers confirmed that new drivers often rely on solid waste workers to teach them the routes. Multiple employees expressed that the solid waste workers and laborers should be compensated for training new workers on the routes. A DPW senior manager said that drivers who have recently received their CDL license have approached them and expressed interest in working with DPW. However, the DPW senior manager stated he informs them not to pursue a job with DPW because they do not provide the necessary training for drivers. The senior manager recommends that new drivers obtain training and experience elsewhere before considering a DPW career. In the case of a DPW fatality in November 2024, the driver was on the job for less than seven (7) months when the incident occurred.

The OIG learned that solid waste workers are often responsible for assisting drivers when backing up or navigating the City’s tight alleys. OSHA refers to those assisting drivers as “spotters” and states they are a proven method of protecting employees on foot behind a vehicle. These solid waste workers receive no spotter training. OSHA provides guidance regarding backing safety solutions, and multiple spotter

trainings are available.¹⁵ Despite the lack of training, the OIG found discipline drafted for some solid waste workers for not helping and spotting a driver in tight quarters through streets and alleys.

Numerous witnesses reported that the supervisors are not provided with leadership or management training. Witnesses said supervisors could benefit from leadership training and cited their poor communication and difficult conversations with their subordinates. Numerous supervisors said they would welcome supervisory or management training as they only received on-the-job training.

Heat Illnesses

The OIG's prior reports regarding heat safety concerns, including water and Gatorade supplies, detailed information that was observed during numerous site visits. This section provides additional details about the heat issues experienced by workers that support the information in the prior reports.

The investigation uncovered DPW correspondence regarding the initial OIG referral to DPW management on June 20, 2024, regarding the complaints of lack of water, Gatorade, broken ice machines, and non-functioning air-conditioning. The Former Bureau Head wrote they were working on a solution to the ice machine issue at Cherry Hill, and the locker room area had not had air-conditioning for heat for years, which he recently discovered. He noted there were trailers with temporary air-conditioning. However, when the OIG visited Cherry Hill on July 10, 2024, the temporary air-conditioning units failed to cool the trailer as the temperatures were above 80°F before 7:00 a.m. The Former Bureau Head confirmed that while they cannot have employees working in those conditions, "when employees who are disgruntled in a union shop environment, this is what you get." He went on to state that they are being held accountable for accidents, not wearing PPE, and abusing equipment, and stated, "they [the workers] can be replaced."

Numerous workers stated they were not provided with Gatorade until after the OIG referral. Several stated they had received Gatorade many years ago, but it stopped because they were told that Gatorade causes cramping issues. Many employees said water and Gatorade are limited, and they cannot take what they need. Other employees stated they often purchase their own drinks for the workday. During site visits on July 16th, the OIG observed water and Gatorade stored in locked rooms or areas not accessible to employees, with supervisors responsible for refilling bins that are available to employees. On July 23, 2024, the Former Bureau Head informed a DPW Chief that staff at their facility said they could take one (1) Gatorade and one (1) bottle of water daily. The DPW Chief replied that they instructed two (2) waters and two (2) Gatorades per person and asked if they should provide more. The Former Bureau Head responded that two (2) of each is a good start.

Numerous employees stated they have either experienced or witnessed heat-related illnesses on the job. The employees described instances of passing out, feeling light-headed, and cramping. According to a solid waste driver, heat exhaustion is common during the summer, while a DPW supervisor reported that some supervisors instruct unwell employees to persist throughout the remainder of their workday. Several employees noted that supervisors would tell workers suffering from heat issues that they could not handle it or were being soft. Multiple workers stated they did not report their heat-related illnesses and sought their own treatment after the workday. Additionally, several employees said that supervisors and drivers would push for the employees to finish the workday. A solid waste worker stated, "It's like the trash is more important than us," while another said that task completion is prioritized over worker concerns. DPW supervisors denied writing anyone up for not being able to finish a workday due to illness. Supervisors stated a written reprimand would only occur if a worker left their route without contacting the

¹⁵ <https://www.osha.gov/preventing-backovers/solutions>

supervisor. The OIG reviewed multiple disciplinary actions where supervisors wrote individuals up for not notifying them or providing an explanation for leaving the route.

DPW’s Former Bureau Head noted that, while on their routes, drivers are responsible for their crews. The Former Bureau Head said they have responsibilities similar to a supervisor while out on a route when a supervisor is not present. He stated that he had observed a tendency among drivers to downplay workers’ complaints and urge them to “suck it up.” According to the City’s position description for a solid waste driver, they must have the ability to lead a crew, notify the central office or call an ambulance if a member of the crew is injured, and inform the supervisor of discipline or other problems on a route.

There are two solid waste workers and a solid waste driver on all routes. All three employees must agree to mandatory breaks and be willing to stop. Due to the task work assignment, the priority is to complete the routes quicker rather than stop for breaks or illnesses. Some managers interviewed stated that task work encourages workers to push through illnesses and sicknesses so that they can finish their day.

On days of extreme heat or other inclement weather, workers stated they should be allowed to begin their routes earlier. DPW allowed workers to begin their shifts earlier on August 28, 2024, and according to DPW leadership, received positive feedback from the workers.

The OIG requested records related to reported heat-related illnesses for DPW employees in July 2024. When DPW received the information from the Worker’s Comp Vendor, the City’s third-party worker’s compensation administrator, DPW removed ten (10) illnesses from the spreadsheet. The OIG issued a [Management Alert](#) to DPW management on October 15 and received their response on October 23, 2024. DPW correspondence showed that DPW removed the illnesses determined to be caused by syncope. A DPW representative explained that they did not count it as heat-related because syncope can be caused by dehydration, low blood sugar, or low blood pressure.

Table 9 below shows the number of heat-related illnesses reported from 2021 to 2024. The number of reported heat-related illnesses rose to 12 in 2024. However, it is important to note that witnesses said that heat-related illnesses are not always reported.

Table 9: Heat-Related Illnesses by Year

Year	Number of Heat Illnesses
2021	8
2022	7
2023	2
2024	12
Total	29

Heat Policy & Training

In prior years and throughout the summer of 2024, DPW did not have a standard heat safety policy. DPW’s Environmental Regulatory Compliance and Safety (ERCS) Chief (ERCS Chief) provided the OIG with a draft Safety Plan in December 2024 that included heat and cold weather safety. Solid waste workers and drivers stated the only heat-related training they had received occurred on August 6, 2024, in the days following Ronald Silver II’s death. That heat training was provided to nearly 300 DPW employees from Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill at the same time.

The OIG attended the August 6, 2024, training. Before the meeting began, the Inspector General addressed

the employees and provided her work cellphone number to the workers for reporting concerns. Grief counseling services were provided at the August 6, 2024, training through Roberta's House, a grief support center. Additionally, the Mayor, the DPW Director, and other DPW leaders spoke to the employees. Information regarding heat-related illnesses was discussed with the employees during the training, but, numerous witnesses stated that the heat-related information was not helpful, too technical, and did not speak directly to their job experiences when working in the heat.

Employees also stated they would be interested in receiving CPR training. The American Red Cross and other entities provide hands-on CPR classes. Other witnesses noted that it was too large of a group to have a productive training and believed smaller groups and interactive trainings would be better going forward. According to workers and supervisors, this meeting was the first time in history that Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill employees had ever attended a meeting together. Due to the large number of employees and this being the first meeting together, some employees appeared distracted during the training. A supervisor said they did not feel the training pertained to them, so they talked throughout the training. That same supervisor explained to the OIG that if someone passed out from heat exhaustion, they believed you should "just throw cold water on them."

In DPW's [July 16th response](#), the agency noted they take proactive steps to prepare for summer temperatures, including providing comprehensive training to educate employees and their supervisors about the risks of heat-related illnesses and ensuring all work sites are equipped with ample supplies of water, rest areas, and cooling stations. On the same day, the Former Bureau Head emailed the Deputy Bureau Chief, saying that he was not aware that DPW had trucks with no air-conditioning equipped and wanted to target replacing those first.

The OIG requested records from DPW related to heat-related training. In June 2022, 53 Bowley's Lane and 51 Cherry Hill employees received heat-related training. According to a Workday report, the two yards had more than 250 total employees in 2022, indicating that fewer than half received heat training between the two yards.

ERCS did not conduct any heat training sessions in 2023. ERCS held select trainings on July 11, 12, and 19 in 2024. These trainings were only conducted with supervisors and were held on Microsoft Teams. The OIG learned that the supervisors were not required to turn their cameras on during the Microsoft Teams meeting. During their interviews, numerous supervisors stated they had not received heat training until the large August 6th training. A review of the heat training records for the July 10, 11, and 19 sessions revealed only six (6) of the 21 supervisors at Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill attended the training. The ERCS Chief recalled that some supervisors remained in the meeting hours after it had ended, indicating that they joined the meeting but walked away.

One day after Ronald Silver II's death, DPW's ERCS Chief wrote in a message that, "If we can demonstrate that we have provided the resources and the training, it's the employees lack of working with management. My beloved Algebra II teacher used to shake her head and say you can lead a horse to water; but, you can't make them drink." During their interview, the ERCS Chief stated they do not have the power to make personnel go to trainings and repeated that you can lead a horse to water but can't make them drink. The lack of documentation of training made these comments more concerning.

As noted in the OIG's prior reports, providing a safe workplace pursuant to OSHA regulations and the City's MOUs with labor unions is necessary for the well-being and health of the workforce.¹⁶ Risk

¹⁶ <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure/water-rest-shade>

Management expressed that it is important for each agency to develop protocols and safety guidelines specific to the jobs within their agency.

DPW provided a draft safety plan, which included heat safety protocols. MOSH heat standards went into effect on September 30, 2024. The standards apply to workers whose environments reach 80°F or higher. The protocols require employers to provide workers breaks and mandatory monitoring when temperatures reach 90°F or higher. Furthermore, employers are to supply workers with drinking water at no cost and located as close to the work area as possible. Each employee should have access to 32 ounces of water per hour available to them.

Standard Operating Procedures & Safety Training

During the investigation, the OIG asked employees what they would change if they held the director position for a year. One DPW leader said they would like to see the budget increased so that DPW could develop a comprehensive safety program. They explained that DPW lacks safety training and protocols, which numerous employees also expressed.

The investigation also uncovered that currently, local governments like the City are not subject to the fine provisions of the MOSH act, even in cases of serious violations that involve an employee death (Exhibit 31).¹⁷ The inability of the safety oversight group to hold another government entity financially accountable for their mistakes results in less incentive to take corrective measures. However, a proposed Maryland Senate bill would require “public bodies”, such as the City, to pay civil penalties for citations.¹⁸ The fact that OSHA cannot fine another government entity results in less government worker protections than private sector employees, where an entity can be fined.

At the OIG’s request, DPW provided a list of numerous SOPs for its divisions. For BSW’s Routine Services division, five (5) SOPs were received. They were checklists and SOPs for the winter and summer, and an SOP for safe work procedures for refuse collection. Although DPW was able to provide these documents, DPW acknowledged that they were unable to confirm when the SOPs were disseminated and if employees had to sign an acknowledgment to confirm their understanding and receipt of the documents. DPW’s Office of Safety Training and Professional Development’s (OSTPD) Chief (OSTPD Chief) said OSTPD was responsible for safety training courses, except for heat safety training that ERCS administered. The OSTPD Chief stated that OSTPD training sessions are typically requested by DPW supervisors at certain facilities. The ERCS Chief explained if employees want to be trained in a certain area, they must ask their supervisor to request the training. The OSTPD Chief noted that they are preparing to start CPR and First Aid training with solid waste drivers. From witness interviews, many solid waste workers expressed interest in attending.

The OIG requested a list of the BSW employees and supervisors who have attended OSTPD training in 2023 and 2024. DPW replied that OSTPD provided agency-wide training sessions, and the records were not separated into training sessions for each bureau. DPW provided agency-wide records relating to the following classes offered:

- Customer Service
- Driver Awareness
- New Employee Orientation
- Defensive Driving Re-certification
- Confined Space & Hazard Communication
- Basic Defensive Driving

¹⁷ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/fnotes/bil_0004/hb0244.pdf

¹⁸ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/sb/sb0026f.pdf>

- CDL B-license
- Forklift Practical Class
- Conflict Management
- Intro to CDL B-License
- Driver Improvement
- Basic Skills Screening
- Bloodborne Pathogen
- Trailer Range Roster
- OSHA 10
- MVA Testing
- CPR, AED & First Aid
- Respiratory Protection
- Intro to Driver Improvement Program
- Driver Awareness
- OSHA 30
- NASSCO Training Program
- Bobcat Training
- Trenching & Excavation
- Driver Awareness
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Performance Management
- Accountability in the Workplace
- General Safety

The most frequent classes conducted were the B-License driver training and Welcome Experience/New Employee classes. The records showed 254 classes were provided from January to May 2023, but only 49 were instructed from June to December 2023, as shown in Table 10 below. Table 11 shows the number of total attendees for the classes by month.

Table 10: Safety Training by Month, 2023



Table 11: Safety Training Attendees by Month, 2023



In 2024, OSTPD conducted 26 classes before the OIG investigation began in June 2024. Since then, OSTPD has completed 73 classes. DPW stated that in August 2024, training was completed with a focus on solid waste employees for the following classes: civility in the workplace, CPR, heat illness prevention, and accountability in the workplace for supervisors. DPW noted they will be working to implement additional training for 2025, including Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Inspections, Workplace Violent Prevention, Slips, and Trips and Falls Prevention.

DPW noted that they established a Safety Steering Committee in October 2024 to meet bi-monthly and foster a safety culture across the agency. According to DPW, this committee will be focused on MOSH regulatory compliance, reducing workplace incidents/accidents, enhanced safety training, and regular safety audits and inspections. DPW does not currently have a formal safety plan for BSW. The OIG reviewed a draft of the draft safety plans that DPW is working to finalize.

DPW Safety Duties & Incident Responses

DPW has two sections responsible for different elements of training and incident response. OSTPD consists of 15 employees who report to the OSTPD Chief, including a training manager and training supervisor, six trainers, office support staff, and three safety enforcement officers (SEOs) who respond to DPW accidents. ERCS consists of two employees who report to the ERCS Chief.

A review of multiple incidents, correspondence, and witness statements revealed confusion and tension regarding OSTPD's and ERCS's roles, responsibilities, and processes. DPW's emergency dispatch phone line is referred to as "Control One." The investigation found that DPW did not have a formal SOP for Control One, but it has since drafted one that includes when to contact Control One.

DPW's ERCS Chief was hired in June 2022, and the OSTPD Chief was hired in October 2022. The OSTPD Chief said accidents involving equipment and property damage were transferred to ERCS before their arrival. The OSTPD Chief added that ERCS's and OSTPD's roles were unclear. The ERCS Chief said that DPW management sought to move occupational health and safety duties to ERCS in September 2022. The ERCS Chief explained that ERCS did not become responsible for occupational health and safety until February 2023. During the transition, the ERCS Chief claimed that OSTPD provided ERCS with little information and records. The OSTPD Chief stated they documented roles and responsibilities for each office in June 2023, but the OIG observed the document states it was pending finalization.

The OIG learned that ERCS currently handles incidents involving DPW employee injuries and environmental issues, while OSTPD handles vehicle accidents. The ERCS Chief stated supervisors are expected to call 911 during an emergency and then contact Control One. The ERCS Chief said that in the summer of 2023, a Control One operator did not know which group to dispatch, creating confusion and a delay in addressing the issue. Since then, the ERCS Chief said that OSTPD has been responsible for triaging Control One calls to determine whether OSTPD or ERCS should respond.

The OIG learned that DPW used to have radios, which solid waste drivers could use to provide notice of injuries or emergencies. Currently, DPW utilizes cell phones provided by Rubicon, which includes GPS routing software and the ability to make phone calls. Numerous workers expressed a preference for the radio system, as a call over the radio reaches more supervisors and could provide a quicker response.

The OSTPD and ERCS Chiefs confirmed their divisions are on-call 24/7. The OSTPD Chief stated that OSTPD SEOs always respond in person to accident calls. The ERCS Chief stated that ERCS responds to reported emergencies on a "case by case" basis. When asked what kinds of incidents would require ERCS

to respond in person, the ERCS Chief said safety officers would dispatch for injuries involving a chemical exposure, equipment malfunction, loss of limb, death, or a 24-hour hospitalization.

The OIG learned that the initial facts reported by employees or supervisors to Control One dictate which division responds. The ERCS Chief acknowledged that, in some cases, information was later received that changed their initial assessment of the incident. Several employees and supervisors stated that during an emergency, the protocol is to call 911 and did not mention contacting Control One. The ERCS Chief said that in practice, Control One is almost never called, and there have been many times when they learned of an incident from the Worker's Comp Vendor.

During a fatality that occurred last year, OSTPD attempted to contact the ERCS Chief to respond to the injury. The ERCS Chief stated they did not receive any calls on their work cellphone but later learned that OSTPD contacted their personal cellphone. The ERCS Chief explained that they do not check their personal phone during work hours, and they did not recognize the phone number that OSTPD called from. According to the ERCS Chief's investigative report, they learned of the incident at 4:50 p.m. but did not arrive at the solid waste yard to speak with the supervisor and other involved workers until 7:46 p.m.

OSHA 300 Log Errors

The OIG discovered certain OSHA forms are incorrectly completed. The OSHA 300 log is used to track and maintain work-related injuries and illnesses on an annual basis. The OSHA 301 form is the injury or illness report. The City has chosen to use its EIR form rather than the OSHA 301 form. The Worker's Comp Vendor's electronic injury report form is a source for the City's submission to the OSHA 300 log. In several cases, the "initial treatment" box was often not completed or completed incorrectly.

When the ERCS Chief requested the OSHA 300 logs in November, it was learned that no logs existed for the administration, and the initial EIR forms were not submitted to ERCS, so the information proved difficult to source.

While completing a review in November 2024, the ERCS Chief informed the employees of numerous errors, including missing case number information. Data for Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill was combined but should have been separate.

The importance of submitting accurate information to OSHA should be stressed to all employees during training.

Worker’s Resources, Salaries & Hazards

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Resources & Work Culture

The City is a “second chance” employer, and many solid waste workers have had limited educational opportunities and experiences. For some workers, this is their first job in their lives. Numerous witnesses noted that employees are experiencing trauma or hardships. Some workers experience literacy issues that require additional support and assistance, and depending on the cause, the employee may qualify for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations. During the investigation, several areas of additional resources that could assist with employee support were identified:

- Counseling Support

Most employees and supervisors expressed that there is a need to have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representative or City social worker visit the yards on a continual basis, possibly every two weeks, to provide behavioral and emotional support services.

DPW employees and supervisors noted that an EAP representative visiting the yards could assist with some of the traumas and issues that workers experience in their personal lives and at work. Having an EAP representative readily available and accessible could assist with de-escalating some of the worker and supervisor tensions and difficult conversations. A DPW Superintendent strongly maintained that an EAP representative should be stationed at the yards due to the importance of employee mental health and well-being. The OIG noted that at the time of this report, the City has over 10,000 employees but only one (1) EAP manager and two (2) employee assistance counselors.

- Additional Workday Support

DPW’s HR team noted that on the second day of the new hire orientation, employees receive their Workday logins and are provided with technical assistance. Despite the new hire orientation process, which included Workday assistance, workers and supervisors highlighted the need for additional support and resources. Numerous witnesses reported difficulties with workers utilizing Workday to input their time and access their personnel information, including benefits enrollment. The OIG’s [prior report regarding health benefits](#) proved this statement true.

A long-tenured solid waste worker reported they were unable to access Workday to enroll in direct deposit. The OIG spoke with DPW’s IT team, and they determined the employee had not logged in within 90 days causing their account to be locked out. The employee stated supervisors attempted to assist him, but he still could not log in, and the supervisors had not contacted the IT department. The OIG was able to facilitate the call with DPW’s IT team, who quickly worked to unlock the employee’s account, and the employee was able to set up their direct deposit. The OIG also found that another employee’s account was locked out, and they could not access their Workday. The OIG sampled 41 solid waste workers’ accounts and found five additional employees’ Workday accounts were disabled, which caused them to be unable to log in.

During their interview, a Solid Waste Leader reported that employees struggle with Workday, and supervisors sometimes must input their work hours for them. One employee noted that they will use a supervisor’s password when they are not working so they can input workers’ hours; however, the system will sometimes say the password is invalid.

- Health Insurance Outreach

The OIG’s [September 2024 Management Alert](#) found that 134 BSW employees did not have either health insurance with the City or the \$2,500 waiver credit. Solid waste workers and drivers accounted for 89 of the 134 employees. The OIG spoke with 46 of the employees, and only two (2) of the employees contacted were aware of the waiver credit. Additionally, 19 employees stated they were unaware that they did not have City health insurance. Numerous employees described receiving brief or no information regarding benefits and experiencing issues with Workday.

The City’s benefits enrollment period for employees to obtain health insurance or the waiver credit was from October 25 to November 1, 2024. DPW worked to set up and hold multiple health insurance outreach events. In advance of the first DPW outreach event, the Inspector General sent out two (2) different text messages to the 134 employees identified to notify them of DPW’s first outreach event that was held at the Middle Branch Wellness Center in Cherry Hill. The OIG also attended this first outreach event and spoke with workers.

The OIG reviewed health insurance data for the 134 employees. As of January 2025, twenty-one (21) are no longer employed with the City, leaving 113 employees still employed to receive the waiver credit or health insurance. The OIG found that 77 of the 113 employees now either have City health insurance or receive the waiver credit, equating to 68%, as shown in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Health Insurance Status, January 2025

Category	# of Employees	Percentage
Has City Health Insurance	53	47%
Receiving \$2500 waiver credit	24	21%
No Health Insurance/No Waiver Credit	36	32%

Despite these workers not having health insurance, the OIG found that many employees have signed up for life insurance with Local 44’s insurance partner (External Insurance Vendor). Although the City offers life insurance to employees, the OIG learned that the External Insurance Vendor sends representatives to BSW yards to meet with new employees in person and explain their additional insurance options. The External Insurance Vendor has provided employees with life and various insurance options since the Local 44 union began. Employees noted that the External Insurance Vendor and potentially other insurance vendors frequently come to the solid waste yards to sell the insurance. To receive the life insurance, employees must be dues-paying members of Local 44, and if they are not, the External Insurance Vendor will sign them up to the union. According to a recent pay code deduction invoice, 314 employees across the six (6) BSW divisions are signed up for insurance with the External Insurance Vendor. Of these employees, 73 have more than \$100 deducted from their paycheck on bi-weekly basis to the External Insurance Vendor. The External Vendor’s pay deductions for all City employees, including BSW, have totaled \$16 million since September 2022.

The number of employees signed up for life insurance with the External Life Insurance Vendor is a potential sign that if interactions occur in person, solid waste workers tend to better understand the benefits available to them. After the OIG’s report, DPW installed computers at Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill.

DPW Equity Office

According to DPW's website, the DPW Office of Equity and Environmental Justice (OEEJ)'s purpose is to promote equity and reduce disparities within City government, develop an equity action plan, conduct equity assessment of existing and proposed policies and practices, and provide guidance, education, and technical assistance to DPW to work towards the development of equitable outcomes. DPW's Equity Committee meets during the workday but solid waste workers and drivers from Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill do not attend.

The OIG obtained records of Equity meetings that DPW's OEEJ has held internally for DPW personnel. Since April 2021, OEEJ has held 23 meetings. All occurred during the middle of the workday on Wednesdays. None occurred at a BSW facility. The meetings occurred at various locations, including on Microsoft Teams or Webex, at the YMCA, War Memorial Building, Baltimore Rowing Club, and two Water Filtration Plants, among others. A review of the sign-in sheets did not appear to show any solid waste worker or frontline supervisor attending the meetings. With the salaries they are paid, many solid waste workers do not have cars, and parking and ride transportation services can be costly. Between transportation costs and scheduling, many BSW employees are unable to attend a luncheon.

DPW's OEEJ Chief led the presentation for two (2) of the 23 meetings, and invoices showed OEEJ spent a total of \$31,220 for vendors to present at some of the other meetings. DPW stated they plan to begin focusing on BSW and are creating Equity Change Groups.

Salaries & Job Hazards

Numerous DPW executives, supervisors, and solid waste workers explained that completing trash and recycling collection in a timely and correct manner is a necessity for the citizens and the health of the general public. Without weekly collections, there would be an accumulation of trash, increased activity of rodents and spread of bacteria or diseases. Due to the importance of trash collection, solid waste workers and drivers are classified as essential, meaning their work is critical to the continuity of City government operations and public welfare.¹⁹ They are responsible for trash and recycling pickup for more than 210,000 households, 290 multi-family dwellings, and businesses.

This essential status means that DPW workers face extreme weather conditions to ensure trash is picked up. During the COVID-19 pandemic, while remote work was encouraged for those who could, DPW workers continued to complete their routes. A COVID-19 outbreak occurred in June 2020 at Bowley's Lane, causing the facility to be shut down for a temporary period. In November 2020, the City Council worked to have wages raised for solid waste workers and drivers and approved by the City's Board of Estimates.

Sanitation workers' jobs recently ranked as the fourth (4th) deadliest job in the United States, with a fatality rate of 41.4 per 100,000 full-time workers.²⁰ From 2019 to 2024, DPW's BSW division had 1,627 injuries reported.²¹ Accounting for the four-day work week, DPW has averaged approximately 1.3 injuries per workday.

¹⁹ According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) Section 3-1701, essential worker is defined as a person who performs a duty or work responsibility during an emergency that cannot be performed remotely and provides services that the essential employer determines to essential or critical to its operations.

²⁰ <https://swana.org/news/swana-news-archive/article/2024/01/10/national-census-of-fatal-injuries-2022>

²¹ This number accounts for injuries across all 6 BSW divisions, including Cherry Hill and Bowley's Lane.

Workers detailed numerous injuries and accidents on the job, including being stuck by needles and falling from or being struck by the truck. Moreover, workers reported encountering dogs and rodents and being sprayed with liquids from the truck. Additionally, DPW’s solid waste drivers and workers complete their work on City streets and alleys, where employees reported having encountered drugs in trash cans and had guns pulled on them by citizens.

Countless employees, supervisors, and other witnesses explained that DPW employees deserve to be paid more not only due to the work they complete, but also due to the daily hazards they face. During the investigation, the OIG spoke with multiple employees who were either currently or had previously experienced homelessness. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) crime statistics from 2023 showed that Baltimore had the eight (8th) highest violent crime rate per population size in America during that time.²² The Council on Criminal Justice reviewed 2023 crime trends in cities and found Baltimore had the 12th highest crime rate.²³

As part of the City’s MOU with Local 44, the workers receive hazard pay, which the Department of Labor defines as additional pay for performing hazardous duty or work involving physical hardship.²⁴ However, the City’s hazard pay for these employees is only 15¢ per hour, equating to \$6 per 40 hours. Figure 22 below shows an employee who received hazard pay of \$9 for 60 work hours.

Figure 22: Employee Environmental Hazard Pay January 2025

Earnings						
Description	Dates	Hours	Rate	Amount	YTD Hours	YTD Amount
Environmental Hazard Pay	01/13/2025 - 01/19/2025	60.00	0.15	9.00	180.00	27.00

The pay grade for Solid Waste Workers ranges from a starting point of \$40,669 to a maximum of \$44,233. Table 13 below shows the average base pay salaries as of February 2025 for solid waste workers and solid waste drivers within Bowley’s Lane and Cherry Hill.²⁵

Table 13: Average Base Pay Salaries by Position, February 2025

Position	Average Salary
Solid Waste Worker	\$42,379
Solid Waste Driver	\$52,948

Furthermore, a recent Department of Human Resources (DHR) compensation study was completed for DPW’s Water and Wastewater division, which was limited to wastewater employees. This study increased salaries for several positions. Such a study has not been done for the BSW division in recent years.

²² <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-does-crime-compare-by-city/>
²³ <https://counciloncj.org/crime-trends-in-u-s-cities-year-end-2023-update/#>
²⁴ <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/wages/hazardpay>
²⁵ Salaries according to Workday as of February 2025.

City of Baltimore Union

The solid waste supervisors are represented by the City Union of Baltimore (CUB). In 2022, CUB issued a report detailing numerous facility issues across the City.²⁶ The CUB President (CUB President) met with the OIG and said there is a lack of training and noted there is an overall lack of training with the City. The CUB President stated that when an employee is promoted to a supervisor from Local 44 to CUB, they need to attend supervisor training. The CUB President said monthly meetings are mandatory for shop stewards, and they are responsible for updating the union boards at work sites, as it is recognized that not all employees can attend meetings.

The CUB President said that during a recent site visit to the Northwest Transfer Station, they observed water accumulation on the floor, employees constructing their own tools due to lack of equipment, and multiple safety hazards, including broken windows. According to the CUB President, the employee's union dues are allocated to office operations, staff salaries, building maintenance, other operating expenses, arbitration costs, and events organized for members.

AFSCME Local 44 Union

Local 44 is the union for DPW solid waste workers and drivers, while the supervisors are members of CUB. According to the solid waste workers and drivers interviewed, they do not feel supported by Local 44. They explained that Local 44's presence has been non-existent, and the union has not advocated for the workers in the last few years. One worker opined that Local 44 is absent until something drastic happens, like when a worker dies. A DPW Superintendent stated they attempted to have a Local 44 representative visit the yard to meet with employees, but the representative declined and suggested that employees attend the union meetings.

Several DPW executives noted the issues involved with the promotional process for solid waste workers and drivers to the supervisor level. They noted that the Local 44 MOU states that promotions are to be based on seniority and does not allow the best qualified candidate to be hired. Rule 44 of the Civil Service Rules, Seniority, and Promotion, states that if seniority is included as part of the examination, a point system will be used. Based on witness statements, promotions as a result of seniority can lead to a lack of upward mobility and advancement for high-performing employees with leadership potential.

Numerous employees questioned how the dues paid to Local 44 are utilized and how they support the solid waste workers and drivers. The OIG sent a subpoena to Local 44 for annual financial statements and the expenditures related to DPW's solid waste workers and drivers. Local 44's legal counsel responded and, ultimately, did not provide the requested records.

When asked if Local 44 received many complaints about safety concerns from solid waste workers, a Local 44 representative said they did not, but they were aware of some complaints regarding insufficient water supplies at the Sisson Street Residential Drop-Off Center. A Local 44 representative acknowledged that union representatives have not been going out to DPW sites as much as they used to since COVID-19 began. Many workers claimed union meetings were not consistent and said they were not informed of meeting times. When questioned by the OIG, the representative stated that Local 44 holds a meeting for members every 3rd Saturday of the month at 1:00 p.m. at 1420 Bush Street, Baltimore, MD 21230. The representative said they notify their members of the meetings but declined to specify the method of

²⁶ https://cub.md.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2023-04/unsafe_and_unprotected_final_ohip_report_2023_2-sidedprintversion.pdf

notification. The representative also refused to speak about the election process and shortly thereafter, the Local 44 counsel informed the Inspector General they would not discuss it with the OIG.

During the investigation, employees alleged misconduct occurring within Local 44. As instructed by the Local 44 counsel, the OIG has forwarded these concerns to the appropriate entities with jurisdiction for further investigation.

Investigative Findings & Recommendations

Findings and Recommendations.....46

Section 1. Operational Issues & Concerns (Page 6) – Findings & Recommendations

Regarding facilities, DPW's responsiveness to the OIG's July site visits and the completion of minor improvements in July and August were noted. However, the lack of minor repairs and upgrades occurring prior to the OIG investigation corroborates witness accounts that the building conditions were neglected and unaddressed for years.

The OIG strongly recommends that DPW and City leadership continue to work to ensure the facilities receive the funding and renovations that are sorely needed at BSW facilities. Due to a higher engineer estimate, the funding for the Bowley's Lane Transfer Station has not been solidified. Funding the Bowley's Lane Transfer Station construction could increase operational efficiency and provide better service to citizens as City trucks could dump their collections there rather than travel further to the landfill or the incinerator.

The OIG also recommends that DPW implement changes to the trash routes and consider re-reviewing recycling routes due to areas of the City recycling at disproportionate rates.

Additionally, the lack of proper staffing levels has negatively impacted solid waste operations. In DPW's emergency request for the recent Waste Vendor contract to provide personnel, DPW noted difficulty filling positions due to competitive wages from non-City and private employers.

The addition of new vehicles to DPW's fleet is noteworthy, but the OIG suggests that DPW work closely with DGS to maintain vehicle maintenance and ensure drivers complete pre-trip inspections without fear of retaliation for identifying an issue. All vehicles, including those of DPW chiefs, superintendents, and supervisors, should have active GPS installed for accountability and safety purposes.

Regarding supplies and equipment, the OIG recommends that DPW continually seek feedback from the frontline workers, especially when uniform changes are considered. Further, worker test programs could help facilitate this feedback before buying items in large quantities.

The OIG also requests that DPW review the creation of a root-cause problem-solving group or the development of a process improvement team to address frequently arising issues and improve operations.

The OIG learned that DPW utilized a priority list to address citizen complaints received, and some addresses would stay on the list for months even if the issues appeared to be resolved. The OIG encourages DPW to review how long addresses stay on follow-up after complaints are received.

Section 2. Injuries, Discipline, & DPW Management (Page 21) – Findings & Recommendations

The investigation uncovered that in 2024, 154 of the 293 BSW injuries that occurred were Bowley's Lane or Cherry Hill employees. The OIG recommends that DPW formalize a standard operating process and conduct comprehensive training for injuries, especially in the solid waste division, where the work is ranked the fourth (4th) deadliest job in the United States.

The standard operating process should also include a light duty program to alleviate confusion regarding assignments and return-to-work processes.

The OIG recommends that DPW report any concerns with the Health Clinic contract to the Worker's Compensation Division in the Law Department and Risk Management. The OIG also learned that the

Health Clinic is inconvenient for many solid waste employees to travel to and are reportedly not conducting physical evaluations.

The OIG encourages performance evaluations to be completed for frontline employees and supervisors. Disciplining employees without documenting or providing feedback on job performance lowers morale. Further, it creates the appearance that there is a lack of accountability for frontline supervisors. DPW should also work to ensure that new solid waste employees receive one-on-one explanations of the discipline process, especially regarding occasions.

At the time of their interviews, workers believed their supervisors did not support them, did not care for their safety, did not handle injuries properly, and were unwilling to assist. The frontline supervisors require comprehensive training, especially in conflict management and de-escalation. Once trained, these supervisors should be held accountable to the standards outlined in the training. Additionally, the OIG encourages DPW to review the process of promoting based on seniority.

As a result of earlier OIG reports, DPW established an anonymous tipline. The OIG commends this and other tiplines but strongly suggests that DPW develop additional processes to maintain direct dialogue with solid waste workers so that employees feel comfortable raising concerns. Moreover, if employees do report concerns, DPW must ensure they take the appropriate action and attempt to resolve the issue. During the investigation, DPW leadership visited to Bowley's Lane and Cherry Hill, which should continue with a rotating schedule to bridge communication gaps between frontline employees and leadership.

Section 3. Training and Safety (Page 29) – Findings & Recommendations

The investigation revealed that DPW lacks a comprehensive job training program for new solid waste workers and drivers. The current on-the-job training that is provided contributes to an unsafe work environment and increases the chances of injury. The OIG suggests DPW solicit input from workers and create a standard operating procedure and training class for new workers before they work a route. While DPW drivers attend a driving class, they should also be shown how to navigate the City's tight alleyways before their first day driving on a route. DPW should consider developing a mentorship program and work to identify individuals with leadership qualities who may be able to fulfill the trainer role.

DPW, along with other agencies, should strive to have comprehensive safety programs that prioritize employee safety. Heat training must be completed at all levels of BSW and tied to employees' work experience. These trainings should be followed by refresher courses and classes. Supervisors must understand the importance of employee safety and be mindful of mandatory breaks. DPW will need to develop processes to ensure that workers are taking proper precautions due to the task work environment. DPW's safety steering committee should include solid waste workers and drivers to maximize its effectiveness and impact. When conducting training, DPW must explain how the topic applies to their jobs. Further, the OIG recommends that DPW work with Risk Management to conduct a safety analysis of solid waste positions and review ways to decrease the number of injuries.

Regarding the two safety divisions within DPW, ERCS and OSTPD, the investigation revealed that the confusion surrounding roles and responsibilities has impacted trainings and responses to incidents. Streamlining and formalizing processes with a focus on incident response is critical when crises occur. Additionally, workers cited radios as an effective resource during emergencies.

Section 4. Worker's Resources, Salaries, and Job Hazards (Page 38) – Findings & Recommendations

The OIG recommends that DPW leadership work to provide additional resources for employees, including:

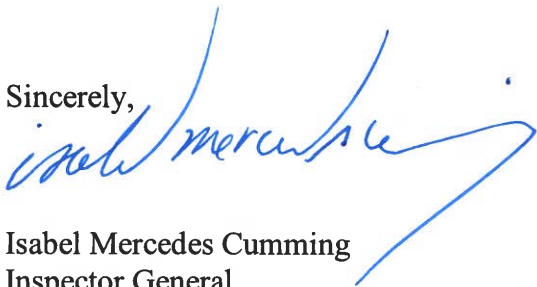
- Bi-weekly onsite visits by a designated counselor/social worker or EAP representative.
- Comprehensive explanations of the City's health insurance options and waiver credit upon hire and during the benefit enrollment periods.
- Form equity affinity groups that are tailored to the solid waste workers.

DPW may also want to review other City agencies that may be available to provide support for additional resources. For example, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development offers re-entry services, which may benefit DPW employees who are experiencing challenges.²⁷

Employees described working in extreme weather conditions, facing hazardous situations, and experiencing injuries. The repetitive actions required for the physical work can have long-term injury effects for workers. Nearly all employees interviewed, including members of DPW leadership, expressed that the employees deserve to be paid more than their starting pay of \$40,669.

Currently, despite the job dangers, their hazard compensation is only 15¢ per hour, totaling \$6 for a 40-hour work week. The OIG encourages DPW to work with DHR to review these salaries, especially due to the personnel crisis DPW has faced for several years.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

²⁷ <https://moed.baltimorecity.gov/northwest-baltimore-career-center-contact>