



# Cover up!

Ainsley Fraser draws the net over sheeting systems.

Commissioning a new vehicle without a so-called 'auto-sheet' system is hard to understand. Especially when you bear in mind the design maturity, functional benefits and safety factors associated with modern sheeting systems.

In addition to the range of integrated and automated options available from mainstream manufacturers as part of skip loader, hook loader and drawbar trailer specifications, there are specialist and aftermarket systems. These can be retrofitted onto a unit which is already in

service – or indeed a new unit purchased without one.

There are also a few semi-automatic systems, which raise the sheet roll on a mast behind the cab, and then require the operative to manually pull the sheet over the load.

Large waste bulkers – usually based on



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articulated trailers, are well catered for too. Walking floor and ejector designs are normally top loaded – so cover / closure options include sheeting systems, but sky-facing ‘barn doors’ and cantilever designs are established and favoured as well.

The key point here is that there are enough good, competent and compliant choices out there for it to be effectively unnecessary in this day and age for any driver or operative to have to climb onto either the vehicle or the load in order to sheet it.

A quick look at some of the accident statistics provides some compelling evidence – and they underline why the safest place for the driver or operative is on the ground. Estimates vary, but based on the range of averaged statistics available, some of which are dated, it would seem that over 40%\* of KSIs (Killed or Seriously Injured) incidents which occur in, on and around vehicles in the workplace involve falls during sheeting and unsheeting procedures. Tipper and waste carrying vehicles, including bulkers, are identified as those presenting the highest risks.

There are two critical operational and dimensional considerations to consider when specifying a sheeting system. Firstly, the arc of the operating arms needs to be long enough to roll out the sheet ‘over’ the

load – not across it. This is particularly important with jagged or uneven loads – scrap metal for instance – where dragging the sheet across the load will puncture or tear the material. The second issue is about maximum overall width in transit ... 2.55 metres. This can be an issue, particularly where larger or oversize containers are in use, as the operating arms need to be wide enough apart not to foul the container during loading. This is then over-width for transit. Some designs cater for this potential problem by incorporating chassis side mounted telescopic ram assemblies to increase the overall width of the sheeting system arms during loading.

In the event that a mechanical, automated or semi-automated sheeting system is not available on a skip loader or hook loader, then recommended practice would appear to be that the container should always be sheeted and secured before it is lifted onto the vehicle – not afterwards.

The requirements for waste loads to be sheeted or covered are actually driven by environmental regulations rather than vehicle related road safety issues – although, having been the recipient of a lump of rubble directed at my windscreen from an unsheeted skip quite recently, maybe it should be a safety of loads in transit requirement as well.

There is no shortage of good, clear and understandable guidance on the safe operation of skips and containers in the waste industry – although in my opinion, all of them could benefit from more and better coverage on sheeting systems and their use. The publication ‘Skip and Container Safety in Waste Management and Recycling’ was produced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in consultation with the Waste Industry Safety and Health (WISH) forum – and it looks from the reference (01/13 WASTE06(rev1)) as if it was revised a couple of years ago. There is also a really useful leaflet (INDG378(rev1)), published by HSE in December 2013 called ‘Safe use of skip loaders – Advice for workers’ – and there is a web-friendly version too.

Sheeting systems remain the ‘best practice’ solution both for general compliance and safety – and they are likely to remain the method of choice. Alternatives, such as the recommendations of a scoping study for the Health and Safety Executive (Contract Research Report 305/ in 2000) argued that all ‘waste containers’ should be closed, but such a plan would not be a viable option, given the mix, variety and sizes of materials often carried.

\* contains information relayed from multiple sources.