Garbage-Truck Crashes Down 13%, but the Deadliest Mistakes Keep Repeating, J&Y Law Finds

U.S. garbage-truck crashes fell from 4,250 to 3,700 over a two-year span, but deadly California crashes show that routine collection maneuvers remain dangerous.



J&Y Law warns that pedestrians and cyclists remain at risk in garbage-truck crashes despite a nationwide decline in collisions.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, September 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The number of garbage-truck crashes on U.S. roads has fallen for three consecutive years. But pedestrians and cyclists remain especially vulnerable when those crashes occur. That is the warning from the personal injury attorneys at J&Y Law following a review of the latest federal data and fatal California incidents involving the same preventable dangers: garbage trucks backing or turning into people in their path.

Federal crash data reviewed by J&Y Law shows garbage-truck collisions falling from roughly 4,250 in 2022 to 3,950 in 2023 and 3,700 in 2024. That represents about 550 fewer crashes in two years, a decline of nearly 13%. If that pace continues, the annual total will fall to roughly 2,900 crashes by 2027.

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>
> *Stacy Thumsuden, Esq.*

But a falling crash count does not paint the entire picture. Even as crashes dipped, injuries in large-truck crashes rose about 5% in 2024, to more than 161,000, according to the National Safety Council.

Nationally, pedestrian deaths remain nearly 20% above where they were a decade ago, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association. J&Y Law's evidence review, citing Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and Solid Waste Association of North America data, also

found that roughly 75% of the people killed or injured in waste-truck crashes are members of the public, not sanitation workers.

The trucks operate in places most other heavy commercial vehicles rarely go: residential streets, alleys, school zones and neighborhood intersections. Routes can involve repeated stops, wide turns and frequent reversing, sometimes before sunrise.

John Gustafson, CEO of Frontier Waste Solutions, said garbage trucks present a distinct set of hazards.

"Garbage trucks create unique hazard profiles: blind spots that differ from standard commercial vehicles, unpredictable stop patterns, and the challenge of operating oversized equipment in corridors designed for passenger cars," Gustafson said. "In dense mixed-use areas, these conflicts are increasing as development outpaces infrastructure planning."

The people doing the work face enormous risks as well. In 2024, refuse and recyclable material collectors recorded 37.4 fatal work injuries per 100,000 workers, making it the fifth-deadliest civilian occupation in the country. The rate for all U.S. occupations was 3.3 per 100,000. Of 32 fatal occupational injuries recorded in solid-waste collection in 2024, 23 were transportation-related, or nearly 72%.

"The risks sanitation workers face are underreported and often misunderstood," Gustafson said. "The most dangerous moments aren't always what people assume. It's the repetitive dismount and remount cycle, working in low-visibility conditions at dawn, and operating on routes where traffic patterns don't account for a truck that stops every 30 seconds."

The fatal crashes reported across California in 2025 and 2026 show how quickly ordinary collection maneuvers can turn deadly:

* In September 2025, a man was struck and killed by a garbage truck before 6 a.m. on a residential street in Escondido.

* In November 2025, a 50-year-old woman was struck and killed by a garbage truck as she crossed the street near Pio Pico Elementary School in Santa Ana.

* In February 2026, a pedestrian was struck and killed by a garbage truck on Highway 4 in Contra Costa County.

* Also in February 2026, a bicyclist or motorcyclist was killed in a collision with a garbage truck at an intersection in the Selma area of Fresno County.

J&Y Law has handled these types of cases before. Top Verdict recognized the firm's $3 million settlement in Bicycle v. Garbage Disposal Truck Driver [Filed under Case No. 20CV369903 in

Santa Clara County Superior Court] as the #1 such settlement in 2024.

"Our client was on a bicycle when a garbage truck backed into them," said Parham Nikfarjam, Senior Trial Attorney at J&Y Law, who handled the case with J&Y Law Co-Founder and Managing Partner Yosi Yahoudai. "A garbage truck driver has mirrors, cameras, even a spotter when they need them. But those safety features only work if they're used every time. A shortcut on a collection route can put a pedestrian or cyclist under a truck in seconds."

"I worked as an ER nurse before becoming an attorney, and I've seen what a collision with a heavy truck can do to a person's body," said J&Y Law attorney and registered nurse Stacy Thumsuden. "For someone on foot or on a bike, there may be very little chance to get out of the way once that truck starts backing or turning. So yes, a 13% drop in crashes is good news. But people are still dying in crashes we already know how to prevent."

A Los Angeles case shows how severe those injuries can be. In July 2025, a Los Angeles County jury returned a $48.8 million verdict for Kamran Hakimi [Filed under Case No. 24VECV05119 in Los Angeles County Superior Court], a pedestrian struck by a turning City of Los Angeles sanitation truck while crossing the street. Hakimi suffered a catastrophic brain injury and was left in a vegetative state. The City had admitted its driver's negligence before trial.

"I believe the most effective approach is to treat low-speed maneuvering and roadside work as high-risk activities," said Joshua Harrison, founder of Underground Towing & Salvage. "Clear procedures for reversing, vehicle positioning, visibility, communication and exclusion zones can prevent complacency. Equipment matters, but consistent operating procedures and situational awareness are what make those safeguards work in practice."

About J&Y Law

J&Y Law is a California-based personal injury law firm representing clients in high-stakes motor vehicle accident and injury cases. The firm combines strategic legal insight with relentless advocacy to help clients access care, navigate complex claims, and recover full compensation. When the system gets complicated, J&Y Law makes it simple and has delivered award-winning results since 2010. For more information or to speak with a member of the team, visit www.jnylaw.com or call (877) 718-9845.

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