

Clock is ticking for waste criminals as new taskforce launched

A new taskforce dedicated to tackling serious and organised waste crime, such as dumping hazardous materials on private land and falsely labelling waste so it can be exported abroad to unsuspecting countries, has been launched today (16 January 2019).

The Joint Unit for Waste Crime (JUWC) will for the first time bring together law enforcement agencies, environmental regulators, HMRC and the National Crime Agency in the war against waste crime.

Serious and organised waste crime is estimated to cost the UK economy at least £600 million a year and a 2018 Home Office review found that perpetrators are often involved in other serious criminal activity, including large scale fraud and in some cases modern slavery.

To tackle the growing trend in criminal waste networks, the new unit will conduct site inspections, make arrests and prosecutions and, upon conviction, push for heavy fines and custodial sentences.

By working together in this way, joint Unit partners can more easily share their intelligence and resources to take swifter action when investigating criminal waste operations and other connected illegal activities, such as money laundering and human trafficking.

The new unit bolsters the Environment Agency's (EA) existing efforts to tackle waste crime. Last year, the Agency's dedicated team stopped illegal waste activity at 912 sites – 12 per cent more than the previous year. As a result of prosecutions taken by the EA, businesses and individuals were fined almost £2.8 million for environmental offences in 2018.

Toby Willison, Chair of the JUWC Board, said:

The war against waste crime just took a giant step forward. The launch of this new unit means we now have a full complement of partners across law enforcement as well as our counterparts in Scotland and Wales to bring down waste criminals for good.

We will target serious and organised criminals across the country as they try to illegally exploit the waste industry and the environment. These criminal gangs need to know that we have them in our sights.

The Joint Unit for Waste Crime is one of a number of initiatives in the government's landmark Resources and Waste Strategy, which is focused on

tackling waste crime and driving up levels of performance in the industry.

Welcoming the new Unit, Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

Waste crime is a scourge on our environment and this new Joint Unit for Waste Crime will crack down on the criminals responsible.

Criminals are shifting their focus to waste crime as they expand their illegal activities and it's vital that we take action. The Joint Unit will shut down illegal waste sites, catch criminals before they can do further harm to our environment and local communities, and make them pay for the damage they have done through custodial sentences and the payment of compensation.

Since 2015, six legislative changes have been made to enable the EA to take tougher action against waste criminals. This includes the Agency having the power to restrict access to problem waste sites by locking gates and barring access. Environment Agency waste crime budgets have also risen by £60 million for 2014-22.

Further quotes from JUWC partners

Steve Bennett, Deputy Director of Tasking and Coordination at the [National Crime Agency](#) (NCA), said:

The NCA welcomes the establishment of the Joint Unit for Waste Crime.

As partners in a whole system response to organised crime, we are committed to supporting its efforts in bringing criminals to justice and limiting environmental, community and commercial impact in order to protect the economy and the public.

Simon Walker, from [HMRC's](#) Fraud Investigation Service, said:

We are proud to be part of the JUWC. Waste crime is a blight on our society, with those responsible often involved in a raft of other crimes including large scale fraud that rob our vital public services of much-needed funds.

This new unit will allow us to share resources, expertise and intelligence and take the fight to these criminals, protecting our communities and creating a level playing field for honest

businesses.

Martin Cox, Head of Service for Regulation at [Natural Resources Wales](#), said:

We are really pleased to be part of this initiative. Organised waste crime operates across political boundaries and is damaging to our communities, our environment and our economy.

It's essential that as the responsible agencies across the UK, we work together to address this threat.

Jennifer Shearer, Head of Enforcement at the [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#) (SEPA), said:

SEPA's Regulatory Strategy makes it clear that 'compliance is non-negotiable', and being a partner on the Joint Unit for Waste Crime is a clear step forward in ensuring that responsible agencies work together to disrupt and prevent waste criminals from operating.

Organised waste crime operates across geographical boundaries and has a serious and detrimental impact on our environment, communities and compliant businesses. Working together in this way allows us to tackle this criminality swiftly and effectively.

Steve Thomas, Detective Superintendent at [North Yorkshire Police](#), said:

The Joint Unit for Waste Crime will provide a valuable link for police forces who are tackling organised waste crime and those who use waste management as an illegal enterprise or as a front for money laundering.

I look forward to seeing the development of our relationship with Joint Unit partners in a bid to disrupt and dismantle these criminal organisations and their harmful activities.

Further information

- the creation of the JUWC was a recommendation in the [Independent review into serious and organised crime in the waste sector](#), which was published in November 2018. In the report, the Home Office defines serious and organised crime as 'individuals planning, coordinating and

committing serious offences, whether individually, in groups and/ or as part of transnational networks'. Their main categories of serious offences are: child sexual exploitation and abuse, illegal drugs, illegal firearms, fraud, money laundering and other economic crime, bribery and corruption, organised immigration crime, modern slavery, human trafficking and cybercrime. Serious and organised waste crime results from the deliberate colonisation by existing criminal groups of otherwise legitimate waste and recycling markets. These groups bring with them a host of additional criminality beyond the crime of illegally handling waste, much of it included under the Home Office definition. They engage in large-scale fraud, threaten and intimidate legitimate competitors, disregard environmental and safety regulations, and feed an illegal economy that draws on modern slavery in some cases

- estimated costs of waste crime are cited from the [Independent review into serious and organised crime in the waste sector](#) and the '[Rethinking Waste Crime](#)' report in 2017, commissioned by the Environmental Services Association
- the JUWC will include law enforcement agencies from across the UK, including the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the police, HMRC and the National Crime Agency