

Directors oversaw harmful waste stored in landfill

A former company boss from Hertfordshire has been fined and another awaits sentence after vast amounts of illegal waste were dumped at a quarry.

Nicholas Bramwell, then a junior director of The Anstey Quarry Company Ltd, and senior partner Liam Winters, ignored the Environment Agency's instructions to stop filling the landfill site near Royston with banned waste. More offences were committed at a second location in the county.

A judge at St Albans crown court fined 42-year-old Bramwell £1,450 after he admitted breaching 5 counts of environmental law at Anstey Quarry and a local shooting ground.

Winters, based in Warwickshire, pleaded guilty to the same charges, but will be sentenced next year after separate court proceedings brought by the Environment Agency.

The Anstey Quarry Company Ltd leased the quarry in Buntingford and had a permit from the Environment Agency to treat and dispose of up to 10,000 tonnes of clean soil waste.

However, the court heard the waste piled up was said to be 30 times that figure, and contained small fragments of contaminating plastic, wood, metal and packaging, as well as soil.

The company stood to save money in how much landfill tax it paid, based on the type and quantity of waste held at the rubbish dump.

Company bosses knew the waste would pose a risk to the environment

Investigators first visited the site in February 2015 and told Winters and Bramwell the huge quantities on site increased the risk of pollution when it decomposed. They were given a month to dispose of it legally in landfill.

A mound of the prohibited waste reached 20 metres into the sky, the height of 5 double-decker buses. Soil was used to cover some of the offending remains in a futile attempt to avoid detection.

Officers were back there a few weeks later, insisting the suspect waste was moved, but things only got worse.

By the July, the men had ignored an enforcement notice from the Environment Agency to stop filling the landfill illegally.

Clare Richards, an installations officer for the Environment Agency in Hertfordshire and who led the investigation, said:

It was clear every time we visited Anstey Quarry over nearly 18 months how there was no substantial change to the illegal way the site was being run.

Operations like this are damaging in many ways, including the potential or actual harm caused to the environment by storing waste materials outside the law; and the financial effect on businesses who follow the rules, pay their way and protect the environment.

Despite warnings from the Environment Agency to stop, the company continued bringing illegal waste onto the site. Winters and Bramwell knew the risks.

Officers' attention was then drawn to landscaping work undertaken by the men's company at Nuthampstead shooting ground, a few miles north-east of the quarry.

More plastic, wood and metal in sizable quantities was taken to the venue to build an embankment or bund that was 10 metres high when investigators inspected it.

Prosecution was inevitable after warnings to stop handling illegal waste were ignored

Before fining Bramwell £1,450, judge Michael Simon reminded the court "the importance of proper environmental management cannot be overstated."

The judge also ordered the director to pay £8,000 towards the Environment Agency's costs of investigating the offences and bringing them to court, and a victim surcharge of £120.

Bramwell, of Shepherds Close, Royston, pleaded guilty at St Albans crown court on 8 June to 5 counts of breaching Regulation 38 (2) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010, in relation to burying large quantities of potentially harmful waste.

Winters, 45, of High Street, Hillmorton, Rugby, admitted the same offences and will be sentenced following a separate trial in March next year, when he is due to face new charges of dumping waste illegally at a quarry near Stevenage.

The offences at Anstey Quarry and Nuthampstead shooting ground occurred between July 2015 and March 2016 and from August 2015 to March 2016 respectively.

There is no suggestion the owners of either site played any part in the criminal activity.

The Anstey Quarry Company Ltd entered liquidation in 2018.