

Environment Agency and eBay crack down on illegal vehicle breakers

A number of vehicle breakers offering illegal car parts have been removed from one of the world's biggest online marketplaces, as part of an education campaign of 20,000 sellers.

During a two-week trial in February, the Environment Agency (EA) and eBay UK joined forces to target vehicle breakers and parts sellers using the marketplace to advertise vehicle parts, including catalytic converters, without the correct environmental permits.

The clampdown saw 10 traders suspected of selling without the correct permissions in place having their accounts suspended. This led to over half of the sellers then applying for the correct permits.

Hotspots identified by the Vehicle Recyclers' Association (VRA) where illegal sellers operate are in Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Lancashire. Many traders are unaware that they need a permit or how to correctly dismantle a vehicle, dispose of the hazardous waste, deal with fire risks and the subsequent risk to the environment.

Malcolm Lythgo, Head of Waste Regulation at the Environment Agency, said:

Our partnership with eBay has been very successful in preventing and disrupting illegal vehicle breaking and parts dealers, and we are pleased that our intervention has led to an increase in businesses applying for the correct permit.

Hazardous components such as engine oil, coolant and batteries can contaminate plants, animals, soil and groundwater – even entering drinking water and risking human health – if not disposed of correctly. This is why it is so important for car breakers and parts dealers to operate within the law.

We want to work constructively with businesses so they can trade compliantly, but it's also important to stress that sellers who continue to operate illegally will be reported to the police and HMRC, and that we will carry out our own on-site enforcement action.

The UK has a strong track record of recycling vehicles at the end-of-life cycle, and we are taking action to ensure this will successfully continue.

Delphine Dauba-Pantanacce, Director, Legal Counsel, Global Regulatory at eBay, said:

Our partnership with the Environment Agency has been vital in better protecting the public who may unknowingly purchase parts from illegal traders.

We hope that this successful partnership, which is still growing and progressing further in 2021, leads the industry and sets an example of effective collaboration between private companies and the public sector, with everyone working towards a common goal of consumer protection.

As part of action to tackle illegal vehicle breakers, eBay is contacting around 20,000 active sellers to prompt them to trade legally. The marketplace is also introducing a requirement for traders to display their EA permit numbers when listing second-hand car parts.

eBay actively suspends traders' accounts on receipt of intelligence from the EA around illegal operations. The platform does not reinstate traders until the appropriate permit is supplied, which can only be issued by the EA if traders meet specific criteria.

Charles Ambrose, Association Secretary at the Vehicle Recyclers' Association, said:

VRA is very pleased that the Environment Agency and eBay are working together with VRA to bear down on the scourge of unpermitted and illegal vehicle dismantlers. This joint initiative to disrupt the waste criminals profitable activities is an excellent example of what can be achieved.

Preliminary results have been extremely encouraging and we hope that the recent pilot exercise can be extended into an ongoing sustainable and effective disruption programme.

The trial period comes amid wider action by the EA to tackle waste and metal crime. In October last year, officers from the Environment Agency and the British Transport Police undertook a week of action which saw over 1,100 vehicles being stopped and 550 sites visited. Over 150 offences were detected and 29 arrests made.

Vehicle breakers can only operate with an environmental permit and the EA offers support with permit applications via its [pre-application service](#). When obtaining vehicle parts from dismantled vehicles, you must use a source that has a permit to depollute and dismantle end of life vehicles. [Information about the regulations can be read here](#).

Customers buying end-of-life vehicle (ELV) parts from an unlicensed breaker or source risk being involved in criminal activity. [You can check the seller has a permit from the Environment Agency to dismantle parts safely here](#).