

Environment Agency targets Watford metal sites

Waste sites in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Essex and East London got a surprise early visit last week from Environment Agency officers working with the British Transport Police (BTP), Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Police, the Joint Unit for Waste Crime (JUWC) and Openreach.

The unannounced inspections were part of a wider BTP operation targeting the theft of cabling and catalytic converters, which has been rising across the south east this year.

Officers from the Environment Agency's Hertfordshire and North London area office visited 33 sites in Brentwood, Havering, Iver, Luton, St Albans and Watford as part of a multi-agency week of action targeting metal and vehicle recycling businesses.

They discovered 9 sites were operating illegally, found several catalytic converters at locations and at one site they uncovered a suspected case of modern day slavery. Meanwhile, 11 drivers of the 21 waste vehicles inspected during road-stops were given advice and guidance.

The intelligence-led visits were part of a BTP operation targeting the theft of cabling and vehicle catalytic converters, which has been rising across the south east this year.

BTP officers searched sites for stolen metal, in particular catalytic converters that are stolen for the precious metals they contain. A surge in the value these metals has prompted a significant increase in thefts. Officers also identified stolen equipment and checked waste companies' financial records to ensure they adhered to the 2013 Scrap Metal Dealers Act.

Alex Chown, Environment Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

This should serve as a warning to those who would flout the law that we and our partners are rooting out waste crime and we won't hesitate to take action.

Unscrupulous scrap metal sites are accepting stolen catalytic converters and cabling, further fuelling their theft across the south east.

Joint investigations and enforcement will continue and if convicted, those responsible could face extensive fines and even prison sentences.

Phil Davies, Joint Unit for Waste Crime Manager, said:

This week of action is another example of how the JUWC together with other partners and agencies are targeting criminals who exploit the waste industry and harm the environment. Utilising the skills and expertise across agencies we will continue to identify further opportunities to impact upon waste crime.

Anyone who suspects illegal waste activity is reminded to report it to our 24-hour hotline by calling 0800 80 70 60, or anonymously contacting Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

You can [check your waste collectors waste carriers registration](#)

See the [British Transport Police press release for details of its activities during the week](#).

The [Joint Unit for Waste Crime](#) was launched in 2020 by the Environment Agency and partners. It brings together environmental regulators and law enforcement agencies to tackle serious and organised waste crime, which is estimated to cost the UK economy at least £600 million year. It also causes great harm to the environment, local communities and businesses.

Everyone involved in the inspections made sure they complied with social distancing rules with correct PPE to make sure everyone involved was safe.