

Press release: Northumberland fire starter fined

A man who deliberately set fire to buildings on his land to avoid demolition costs has been sentenced to 10 months imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to pay over £24,000 in fines and costs after a successful prosecution by the Environment Agency.

The flames from the blaze took fire rescue services four hours to extinguish and the distraction also caused two motorists on the nearby A1 to crash.

Nigel Weston Smith (63), owner of Whittle Colliery in Shilbottle, Northumberland, was charged with waste offences at Newcastle Crown Court on 14 May, 2018. He was sentenced to 10 months imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, fined £14,000 and ordered to pay £10,745.45 costs.

The court heard that Smith, constructed a two storey building at Whittle Colliery without planning permission and was ordered by Northumberland County Council (NCC) to demolish it.

After receiving a fine of £3,000 and a further NCC enforcement notice to remove the building, Smith decided to burn the building rather than pay to have it demolished.

In March 2014 he offered the site as a training venue to Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS), suggesting the building could be set on fire. When NFRS rejected the offer on the grounds that the fire would be too big, it was not a controlled environment and there was inadequate water supply, Smith decided to burn it illegally.

On 5 March he advised NFRS that he was demolishing a large cabin and would burn timber and waste in small amounts. NFRS received three separate reports from members of the public concerned about the fire.

Smith called NFRS again on 20 March saying he intended to burn wood and timber from parts of a building. He stated he lived on site, had adequate water supply and he would not burn if the wind was blowing in the direction of the A1.

At 8.30 that evening, two motorists driving northbound on the A1 were distracted by flames and smoke from a large fire. Both were injured in a collision as the first slowed to call 999 and the second collided into the rear of the first.

It took NFRS four hours to extinguish the fire, which produced a significant amount of smoke raising concerns that the fire would spread. Smith had fled the scene.

Smith was described by Judge Robert Spragg as 'breathtakingly arrogant' by ignoring repeated requests from planning officers to remove the building. He

added that Smith only escaped an outright custodial sentence by a narrow margin.

In mitigation, Smith stated that the remains of the building had now been removed at his own cost and that he regrets his actions.

Rachael Caldwell, Environment Agency, said:

Smith showed complete disregard for environmental laws because he wanted to cut corners and save himself the cost of demolishing a building legally – a building that shouldn't have been there in the first place. It is fortunate that no one was killed by his recklessness. We're pleased with the result of this case and hope this sends a message to anyone out there that thinks they can circumnavigate environmental laws, especially in such a dangerous manner.

[Press release: Custodial sentence for operating illegal waste site](#)

Mr Bruce had pleaded guilty to these offences on an earlier occasion, and was referred to Worcester Crown Court for sentencing.

Mr Bruce received an immediate custodial sentence of 26 months. No order for costs was made at this stage, pending the outcome of confiscation proceedings under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, which will be resolved in due course.

The charges were brought by the Environment Agency under Regulations 38(1)(a) and 12(1)(a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010; Section 33(1)(c) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; Section 161D (1) of the Water Resources Act 1991; and Regulation 10 of the Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry and Agriculture Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010.

Mr Bruce ran a waste disposal operation centred on a site at Ridgeway Park Farm, Throckmorton Airfield, near Pershore, for 3 and a half years, between 2011 and 2014 without any permit. He brought waste onto the site and either dumped it, buried it or burned it.

Responding to complaints from local residents, Environment Agency officers met with Mr Bruce on a number of occasions, conducting site inspections and enforcing environmental regulations. Warnings were issued following evidence that burning had been taking place on the site.

Throughout March and April 2013, Mr Bruce treated and disposed of waste by

burning large quantities of it at Ridgeway Park Farm. For several weeks fires were continually burning at the site causing misery for local residents, endangering health and polluting the air in the area. There was a major impact on the quality of life for local residents, as Mr Bruce burnt a large amount of plastic waste, causing plumes of putrid black smoke across the nearby village.

In April 2013, a fire at the site was attended by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and the Environment Agency, yet Mr Bruce repeatedly ignored the interventions of the Environment Agency and the Fire Service.

The waste on site consisted mainly of construction and demolition waste, some of which included aluminium waste products, which is classified as a hazardous waste. In total, approximately 26,000 cubic metres of waste was brought onto the site by Mr Bruce during the offending period.

Mr Bruce kept his herd of cattle on site grazing amongst the waste and in conditions where polluting effluent was not contained. Environment Agency officers also noticed that waste gypsum powder was being used as animal bedding and advised Bruce that this practice was unlawful. They also noted that the cattle bedding also contained mixed waste, electric cables, drink cans and plumbing parts.

Brown liquid was seen seeping from storage areas, pooling and flowing in the direction of a small watercourse, approximately 100m away. Officers reported evidence of hazardous waste buried and the potential for discharge substances to enter the groundwater and the Piddle Brook.

In sentencing, the Judge commented that this was serious environmental offending and that there was a clear need for a deterrent sentence. Mr Bruce was given some credit by way of a discount on his sentence as he had pleaded guilty and avoided the need for a trial.

Speaking after the case, an Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

Waste crime is a serious offence with tough penalties. It can damage the environment, blight local communities and undermine those who operate legally.

Mr Bruce has shown a blatant disregard for the environment and local community, subjecting local residents to months of misery by bringing on large quantities of waste and burning it on the site.

Everyone who disposes of waste has a duty of care to ensure their waste is handled correctly. Whether you are a business, local authority or householder you must make sure you know where your waste goes so it doesn't end up in the hands of illegal operators.

You can help disrupt and prevent waste crime activity by reporting. The Environment Agency urges people to report waste crime on their incident

hotline 0800 80 70 60 or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

[News story: South West Water fined for polluting Salcombe and Dartmouth](#)

South West Water has been ordered to pay £71,800 in fines and costs for failing to correct faults at sewage treatment works in two of Devon's most popular coastal towns. The prosecution was brought by the Environment Agency.

Problems at the company's sewage treatment works in Salcombe and Dartmouth culminated in the sites breaching their environmental permits. Both sites suffer from saline (sea) water infiltration. However, the main issue was failure to manage and maintain processes and infrastructure at the two sites between 2015 and 2016.

Salcombe treatment works serves Salcombe and the nearby village of Malborough. Sewage pipes upstream of the works cross the estuary foreshore and are submerged at high tide. Some of these pipes have faults that allow saline water to enter the sewer network. The treatment process, that involves the use of bacteria to break down effluent, cannot treat excessively salty sewage.

Excessive salinity can damage or kill bacteria used to break down the effluent and prevents the biological treatment process from operating properly. It can prevent suspended solids from breaking down adequately and disrupt the final stage of ultraviolet disinfection before effluent is discharged into the Kingsbridge estuary.

In 2016 South West Water received a report from consultants that said it could not treat the volume of sewage produced in Salcombe to the required standard during the summer months because of the town's increased summer population.

Between September 2014 and August 2016, Salcombe sewage treatment works breached its permit by repeatedly exceeding the maximum number of non-compliant samples it was allowed.

South West Water is permitted to discharge sewage effluent tainted with saline in an emergency. This normally occurs when saline has been diverted away from the normal treatment process, but the holding tank is full.

In September 2015, the Environment Agency expressed concerns at the frequency of discharges from the saline balancing tank, which holds effluent mixed with saline until it is ready to enter the treatment process. Between 3 February 2015 and 2 May 2015 there had been 36 discharges – one of which lasted 53 hours.

The court heard there were similar seawater ingress and equipment failure problems at Dartmouth sewage treatment works. In January 2015, a valve that keeps seawater out of the sewer was identified as in need of replacement, but wasn't finally replaced until October 2015. The 8-month delay would have resulted in a worsening saline ingress problem.

Helen Todd of the Environment Agency said:

We use the environmental permitting regime to protect and enhance the environment for current and future generations.

South West Water's repeated failure to comply with the conditions of its permit at Salcombe and Dartmouth meant that effluent which had not been fully treated was being released into the water environment.

We are working closely with the water company to improve permit compliance and reduce waste water pollution.

Appearing before Exeter Crown Court, South West Water was fined a total of £50,000 and ordered to pay £21,800 costs after pleading guilty at an earlier hearing to two offences under the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010.

Notes to editor

- South West Water's Salcombe Sewage Treatment Works contravened its environmental permit when it exceeded its maximum number of samples permitted to exceed the limit for suspended solids on 7 occasions between 7 August 2014 and 17 August 2016, contrary to Regulation 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010.
- South West Water's Dartmouth Sewage Treatment Works faced two counts of contravening its environmental permit, contrary to Regulation 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010. The first charge related to discharges containing more than 60mg/l of suspended solids on 3 occasions between 26 January 2015 and 3 November 2015. The second charge related to discharges exceeding the limits for chemical oxygen demand on 3 occasions between 24 July 2015 and 3 November 2015.

[Press release: Events to spread the word about Hull's £42m tidal flood scheme](#)

Hull residents and businesses are being invited to learn more about a multi-million scheme to protect thousands of properties from flooding from the

Humber at two events this month (May).

They will be held at Mr Chu's Chinese Restaurant in St Andrew's Quay Retail Park on Tuesday 15th May and Victoria Dock Village Hall on Wednesday 16 May. Visitors can drop-in anytime between 1-7pm.

Representatives from the Environment Agency and contractors BMM JV will be on hand to discuss plans for the £42million Humber Hull Frontage Improvement Scheme which will improve flood protection to 113,000 properties in Hull.

Following on from an event at the Guildhall last month, this will be a chance for people to discuss plans for these areas in more detail.

Led by the Environment Agency, the Humber Hull Frontage Improvements Scheme presents an opportunity to improve 7-8 kilometres of tidal flood defences at various sites along the Humber Estuary frontage to better protect homes and businesses that are at risk of flooding.

Subject to planning approval, work on the Humber Hull Frontage Improvements scheme will start in late summer and will be complete by the end of 2020.

Project contractor BMM JV – a joint venture between BAM Nuttall and Mott MacDonald – will be sharing early designs and plans which will build resilience along the city's 19 kilometre waterfront.

Helen Tattersdale, project manager at the Environment Agency, said:

These two drop-in sessions follow one we held at The Guildhall last month to share our plans. We want to make sure as many residents as possible are aware of what is being proposed and we're keen to get feedback from them.

Our team is ready to answer any queries residents of business owners may have about what work needs to be done to better protect the city from flooding from the Humber Estuary.

In recent years we have seen the impact tidal flooding can cause and it is vital for the city to have improved flood defences to ensure devastating flooding like that which resulted from the December 2013 tidal surge is few and far between.

Improvements in Hull will be supported by a further four kilometres (2.5 mile) of new and raised tidal defences on either side of the city in the East Riding of Yorkshire, at Hessle and Paull, delivered by East Riding of Yorkshire Council in partnership with the Environment Agency.

The Humber Hull Frontage Improvement Scheme is one of a number of tidal flood

alleviation projects that form part of the Humber Flood Risk Management Strategy. The Environment Agency and local partners are now in the process of developing an advanced approach to managing flooding in tidal areas by the Humber for the next 100 years.

It will be a long-term investment that will contribute to securing the viability of Hull and the wider Humber region, ensuring it retains its place as the eastern gateway to the UK economy.

Press release: £9.5 million Ulverston flood scheme officially opened by the Environment Agency

More than 500 homes and businesses in Cumbria will be better protected from flooding thanks to a new £9.5 million scheme completed by the Environment Agency.

The Town Beck Flood Alleviation Scheme in Ulverston, Cumbria, will reduce flood risk to more than 400 homes and more than 100 businesses, as well as critical tourism infrastructure. A maze of underground water channels (culverts) under the houses, roads and carparks in the town centre have been repaired and/or replaced using innovative techniques and flood defences have been constructed.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, officially opened the scheme, and said:

Cumbrian communities know well the devastation that flooding can cause. The Town Beck flood defence will better protect 500 homes and businesses in Ulverston and support England's tourist economy by improving protection for the railway that leads to the Lake District.

To achieve this, the Environment Agency has worked closely with local residents, Network Rail, United Utilities and the Council. It's a brilliant example of how partnership working benefits people, the national economy and the natural environment.

Town Beck lies within a steep catchment and predominantly runs underground through the town centre. The new scheme consists of a number of sections throughout the town centre including raising existing flood defence walls, installing new floodgates, repairing and refurbishing the underground water channels (culverts), and building a swale in the natural flood plain to

ensure that there is no increase to flood risk in South Ulverston. A new wildflower meadow has also been created as part of the scheme, boosting biodiversity and improving the local environment.

Much of the scheme is underground, so different construction techniques known as 'trenchless technologies' were used. In some cases Environment Agency contractors installed reinforced plastic sleeves to repair pipes – or worked underground wearing specialist breathing apparatus to spray concrete on the inside of the culvert for extra strength.

While this means some of the work isn't visible, it avoided diverting major services – such as gas, water and electric – and allowed construction without having to dig up the road, avoiding unnecessary disruption to residents while the scheme was underway.

Alternative repair techniques were also used to speed up the completion of the project and to reduce disruption to the town. The potential option for the construction of a flood storage reservoir was replaced with an additional large pipe which runs through the railway embankment and a drainage channel to connect to the flood plain.

The scheme will provide a significant improvement in the standard of protection for the area, which has been affected by flooding several times in recent years – most recently in 2009 and in 2012.

Led by the Environment Agency, the project received strong support from partner organisations including Cumbria County Council, South Lakeland District Council, Network Rail and United Utilities, who provided more than £1 million of contributions towards the development.

Similarly, close links to Ulverston Town Council and local community groups have been vital to minimising the disruption to the Cumbrian town, which has many small to medium businesses and is heavily reliant on the tourist economy.

Adrian Lythgo, Chair of the North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee said:

The Town Beck Flood Alleviation Scheme is a great example of how such important work can be completed with little disruption to a town so heavily reliant on the tourist trade.

Often people don't know a river is running beneath their feet or property and could cause such devastating results if flooded. This project has delivered a value for money, quality scheme which I am delighted that the North West Flood and Coastal Committee has supported.

The project was shortlisted for its innovative ways of working at the 2018 ICE North West Civil Engineers Awards.