

Farmers and waste companies urged to check waste management processes or face enforcement action

Farmers, agricultural businesses and waste companies are being urged to check their waste management processes or face enforcement action following a concerning increase in contaminated agricultural plastic waste being intercepted at shipping ports, bound for illegal export.

This year the Environment Agency (EA) has intercepted numerous illegal shipments of contaminated agricultural plastic waste, including silage wrap, which were destined for countries around the world.

In order to legally export contaminated agricultural plastic waste including silage wrap, prior consent is required from both the source country and its destination, alongside all countries through which it travels. These wastes cannot be exported unless the permission of the EA and applicable overseas authorities has been obtained in advance.

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

We take waste crime very seriously, with teams stationed across the country to disrupt illegal activity. It risks real damage to people and natural environments both at home and abroad. "We know that farmers and the agricultural sector care deeply about the environment and don't want to see their waste being illegally exported, but unfortunately we are stopping an increasing amount of contaminated agricultural plastic waste, and it's vital that everyone knows where their waste ends up.

That is why we want to remind farmers and agricultural businesses that they have a legal duty of care to conduct checks on those who collect, store or treat their waste. Anyone involved in its illegal export, from the producer to the exporter, is liable and could face severe penalties.

To ensure that waste is handled properly through to its final recovery or disposal point, farmers and agricultural businesses should always:

- [use the EA website to check that the waste firms they are dealing with](#) have the necessary authorisations for carrying, dealing or brokering waste;
- ensure the waste is accurately described on waste transfer documentation;
- ask where the waste is going;
- ask for evidence that the waste company is authorised to store or treat it and what they intend to do with the waste afterwards.

To disrupt the illegal international waste trade, the Environment Agency continues to visit sites and intercept those who deliberately misdescribe waste as suitable for export without the necessary permissions, as well as targeting illegal shipments at ports. The EA also continues to target those who fraudulently claim packaging export recovery notes against non-packaging material including silage wrap.

The Agency is also a member of the newly formed [Waste Compliance Taskforce \(WACT\)](#) and is working with industry to tackle the illegal export of waste.

Steve Morgan, WACT member and Policy & Infrastructure Manager at plastics recycling charity RECOUP, said:

We have created an Export Waste Crime Working Group which is initially focusing on plastic and brings together experts from across industry and government to increase resilience against waste crime and engage with the UK's environmental regulators to support more effective ways to prevent and tackle the illegal activity blighting our industry.

There are no quick or simple fixes to these challenges, but already we have seen positive steps in terms of engagement and open dialogue with the Environment Agency, and we look forward to carrying this positive activity forward to both tighten the controls around illegal exports and increase confidence in the UK as a quality exporter of material.

Further information about complying with waste duty of care can be found on the [Environmental Services Association's 'Right Waste Right Place' website](#).

Anyone with information regarding the illegal export of waste including agricultural plastics can contact the EA's Illegal Waste Exports team at intelligence@environment-agency.gov.uk or anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

For advice on applying for an export notification from the Environment Agency, please contact AskShipments@environment-agency.gov.uk.