

Government unveils plans to crack down on waste

A crackdown on waste criminals has been unveiled by Environment Minister Jo Churchill today as part of fresh plans to reform the waste industry.

Proposals set out in two new consultations today will clamp down on waste crime and support people and businesses to manage waste correctly.

The reform of waste industry will see increased background checks for firms who move or trade waste, as well as making it easier for regulators across the UK take action against rogue operators.

With waste often handled by intermediaries who conceal their identities to commit serious and organised waste crime, the increased checks will ensure waste is managed by authorised persons only and in a safe manner, making it harder for unregistered operators to find work in the sector.

New plans will also see the introduction of mandatory digital waste tracking, using powers in the landmark Environment Act to overhaul existing waste record keeping. This means those handling waste will record information from the point waste is produced to the stage it is disposed of, recycled and reused. This will enable regulators to better detect illegal activity and tackle waste crime, including fly-tipping, illegal waste sites, and illegal waste exports.

Criminal activities including fly-tipping, illegal dumping, and the illegal export of waste abroad can blight our communities, harm the environment, and pose a risk to human health. In 2018/19, waste crime cost the English economy around £924 million. Local authorities dealt with nearly 1.13 million fly-tipping incidents this year alone.

The new plans build on the extra £60 million given to the Environment Agency to tackle waste crime since 2014 as well as new powers to stop illegal waste sites posing a risk to the environment, including the ability to lock up sites and force rogue operators to clean up all their waste.

Environment Minister Jo Churchill said:

Waste criminals show complete disregard for our communities, the environment and the taxpayer. We have disrupted these rogue operators by giving extra powers to the Environment Agency, with nearly 1,000 illegal waste sites now being shut down each year, while our new Joint Unit for Waste Crime is successfully disrupting criminal gangs, for example, prosecuting fly tippers illegally dumping hundreds of tonnes of hazardous waste across the countryside.

But there is more to do. Reforming the licensing system will clamp

down on abuse of the system and new mandatory digital waste tracking will greatly improve transparency in the sector and make it easier for householders to check that their waste is being disposed of legally.

Together, these reforms will stop criminals abusing the waste system and make it easier to prosecute offenders successfully.

The carrier, broker, dealer consultation will seek views from the waste industry and other stakeholders on the move from a registration to a permit-based system which would mean those transporting or making decisions about waste must demonstrate they are competent to make those decisions.

The Government and Devolved Governments are working closely together to develop a UK-wide digital waste tracking service for those handling waste. This will help businesses comply with their duty of care with regards to waste and help them make more informed choices about how their waste is managed.

Sarah Poulter, CEO of the Chartered Institute of Wastes Management (CIWM), said:

For many years, CIWM has worked with the UK waste and resource management sector to highlight the damaging effects of waste crime on local communities, the environment and the industry it represents. As such, we warmly welcome today's announcement and share the Government's ambition to crack down on illegal waste activity.

The launch of these consultations provides a valuable opportunity for the UK waste and resource management sector to influence its future direction and help eradicate practices which have tarnished its reputation and deterred much needed investment.

Correctly implemented, these developments will provide assurance for both waste producers and managers that they are dealing with responsible collectors while directly reducing the impact of waste crime on society and the environment. They will also help to support CIWM and its members in delivering more sustainable resource management practices and help us move to a world beyond waste.

Jacob Hayler, Executive Director at the Environmental Services Association (ESA), added:

This could be a pivotal moment in the fight against waste crime, a scourge which severely undermines confidence and investment at a crucial time for our sector. ESA is very supportive of the policy proposals outlined which should help to make life difficult for

criminals infiltrating our sector and making a fast buck at the expense of legitimate operators and the environment.

Today's consultations build on significant work to protect the environment from waste crime:

- Between 2017 and 2020, the EA stopped illegal waste activity at 2,700 sites and initiated 191 prosecutions for illegal waste sites, with 39 prison sentences handed down. It also issued fines of over £1.1m for illegal waste sites, plus £5.5m in Proceeds of Crime Act (PoCA) confiscation orders.
- The UK is committed to tackling illegal waste exports, and individuals and businesses found to be exporting incorrectly described waste can face a two-year jail term or an unlimited fine. In 2018/19, the Environment Agency prevented 12,690 tonnes of waste illegally being exported through intervention at sites and ports.
- Recognising the difficulties experienced by some countries in managing imports of plastic waste the Government has committed to consult on banning the export of plastic waste to non-OECD countries.
- The Government has set up the Joint Unit for Waste Crime to disrupt serious and organised crime and reduce its impact on the environment and the economy. The Unit brings together agencies from across the UK including the Environment Agency; Natural Resources Wales; the Scottish Environment Protection Agency; the Northern Ireland EA; the police; HMRC, the British Transport Police and the National Crime Agency.
- Through shared intelligence and enforcement, the Joint Unit is identifying, disrupting and deterring criminals and making them pay for the damage they have done to communities and the environment.