

North East fire risk waste site closed down

A court order is now in place prohibiting anyone from entering or depositing more waste on the site at Shee Recycling at Durham Road, Birtley, after waste stored there became a fire risk.

It's the second time the powers have been used in the North East.

The Restriction Order was secured at Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Court last week (Thursday 23 September) after Environment Agency solicitor Chris Bunting outlined the case.

Environment Agency and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service officers have visited the site numerous times during 2021 to encourage the operators to bring the site into compliance with fire prevention guidance, including reducing waste volumes and introducing fire breaks between piles of waste.

Items being stored at the site include large oil drums containing hazardous waste, cutting equipment, batteries and fuel canisters all of which increase the risk of fire. The site had been at a high risk of a fire breaking out if activities continued.

The Environment Agency has now locked the site's access gate, placing a warning notice at the entrance. Anyone entering the land without reasonable excuse or written permission from the Environment Agency will be committing a criminal offence, as will anyone who tampers with the lock or notice.

Some of the waste stored on site.

Concerns over waste storage

John Crawl, Environment Agency Enforcement Team Leader in the North East, said:

Our priority is protecting the local community and environment. This order has been secured following concerns about the storage of waste at the site and its potential fire risk and after extensive work together with our partners at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

The site is close to other commercial properties, the east coast mainline and Rowletch Burn, and poses a significant environmental risk.

Unfortunately, despite repeated visits and action from the Environment Agency, the company has consistently failed to

adequately address the issues raised.

This is the second time these powers have been used in the North East and it demonstrates the robust steps we will take to put a stop to illegal waste activity and to protect the environment and communities.

While most waste sites are operated responsibly, we will take action against those who flout the law.

Work with fire and rescue service

The Environment Agency is working alongside Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service as enquiries continue.

Each of the 17 community fire stations at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service has the responsibility of assessing which sites in the local area pose the highest potential fire risk to local residents.

After visiting Shee Recycling, crews from Birtley Community Fire Station identified the risk being created by the excessive amounts of recycling materials being stored on the site by the owners.

Paul Thompson, Group Manager West District at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, said:

This case is a perfect example of how the Fire Service is creating the safest community by working in partnership with organisations like the Environment Agency.

Our assessment focussed on the hazards and probable danger to life if a major incident were to occur on the business premises at Durham Road. This included the need to evacuate residential homes in the surrounding area, the risk to transport links, and the overall threat to the environment.

The court's decision to block access to the site shows how seriously all parties have taken this case, and the potential consequences it could've had on the local community if a large fire or major incident had occurred.

We hope this conveys to other businesses in Tyne and Wear that the powers and authority are in place to successfully bring cases like this to court.

To report waste crime call the Environment Agency's 24-hour Incident Hotline on 0800 807060.