

Press release: Hundreds of commercial properties “sitting targets” for waste criminals

The Environment Agency is urging owners of land and property across the South East to be extra vigilant after investigations reveal that ‘baled waste crime’ is on the increase.

The waste is often plastic, builders, commercial or household rubbish that cannot be recycled and which has no monetary value. The waste is compressed into a block or ‘bale’ and concealed by plastic strapping.

There have been incidents of large scale dumping of baled waste on privately-owned sites across Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire since 2017.

Alan Cansdale, an Environment Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

These criminal offences have not been random or opportunistic dumping of waste, but rather systematic and organised crime where secure sites have been targeted using what appears to be legal and above board measures through the property and land leasing process.

Most of the sites have been cleared at great expense to the landowners, with clean-up costs in excess of £200,000 a site.

The Environment Agency wants owners of property and land to be vigilant and to better protect themselves from these unscrupulous individuals. We’re also asking that businesses, organisations and individuals manage their waste responsibly to prevent it from getting into criminal hands in the first place.

The deposit sites include leased and rental properties where the criminals provide false details to secure warehouse space, barns or open land on industrial estates, farms or private property – with articulated trailers on public roads or car parks being targeted as well.

In a bid to stop waste criminals in their tracks, the Environment Agency is appealing to property and land owners, commercial property agents, trade associations and local authorities to be on their guard. With the right advice and checks, landlords can also help safeguard themselves.

Tom Ormesher, Environment and Land Use Adviser for the National Farmers Union (NFU) in the South East, said:

We are keen to raise awareness among our membership about the horrendous impacts of this type of organised waste crime. By

following tips from the Environment Agency, farmers can take some steps to protect themselves from these scammers and avoid being landed with a huge waste problem and a bill that could run to thousands of pounds.

Robin Edwards, South East Regional Director for the Country Land & Business Association (CLA), which represents thousands of farmers, landowners and rural businesses, said:

We wholeheartedly welcome this campaign, as it addresses a growing problem which has a serious impact on landowners and the environment in our region.

We would urge landowners and rural communities to be extra vigilant, be extremely wary around any requests or offers to store waste, and report any incidents or suspicious activity to the Environment Agency.

Commercial property agents, trade associations and local authorities across the region have been given the following advice for landlords and landowners.

- Carry out rigorous checks on prospective new tenants. Land and property owners have a responsibility to ensure anyone leasing their land/premises complies with regulations, so it is essential that you establish how and for what they are going to use the land/property.
- Check any empty land and property regularly and make sure it is secure.
- It is illegal to store waste on your land without the required permits. You may be committing an offence by allowing waste to be stored on your land or property without the relevant permissions and you could be liable to prosecution and the cost of removing the waste.
- Landlords should check before signing a contract that the contract complies with regulations. You can [view whether a potential tenant holds the correct permit to carry out waste operations](#).
- The offer of payment to temporarily store waste is a scam, the waste will likely never be collected.
- Be vigilant and report any unusual behaviour. If you are suspicious of prospective tenants please contact us for more information and advice.
- If you are approached to store baled waste, even on a short term basis, refuse the material and call the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

There are hundreds of commercial properties across the South East thought to be empty, all of which are potential targets for waste criminals.

The economic impact of waste crime in England is an estimated £604M per annum. The Environment Agency is working hard to address this. Its specialist crime unit uses intelligence to track and prosecute organised crime gangs involved in illegal waste activity and to ensure any necessary action is taken against them.

Anyone who sees waste crime taking place, or who has been a victim of illegal baled waste deposit is advised not to approach as these people can be dangerous. Report it by calling our incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

The Environment Agency is working closely with the police in their investigation into these offences.