

Press release: Van crushed for Berkshire waste offences

A van used to dump waste illegally in Berkshire has been seized and crushed by the Environment Agency.

The green Transit had been linked to waste crime across a network of illegal sites in London and surrounding counties. These sites were characterised by illegal entry, which involved the forcing or cutting of locks and chains, or the removal of fencing securing the sites.

The van was destroyed by a licenced scrapyards, under Environment Agency supervision, after it was seized by officers as part of an ongoing criminal investigation into the large-scale illegal dumping of commercial waste. Intensive unlawful waste-dumping involved several small trucks and the movement onto the sites of caravans to mask the waste-tipping. The sites were quickly trashed, with a hefty clean-up bill for the owner, usually in the tens of thousands of pounds.

It is clear from examination of the waste by environment officers that much of it came from small building operations, offices, shops and other small businesses. Under the law, small businesses generating waste are defined as waste "producers," and when they get rid of their waste, have to comply with what is called their "duty of care." This includes prescribed information about the waste, and checks on where it is going.

Failure of any business to comply with its duty of care leaves open the potential for very heavy fines – £5,000 in a magistrates' court, or an unlimited fine if a case is referred to Crown court.

The Environment Agency urges producers of waste, in particular small businesses such as independent building companies, to take responsibility of their commercial rubbish.

Helen Hancock, an enforcement officer with the Environment Agency in Berkshire, said:

If you operate any form of business, you have a legal responsibility to safely contain and legally dispose of any waste produced. If you don't, you can be taken to court as you are committing a serious offence.

When you transfer waste to another person, you must ensure that a written accurate description of the waste is agreed and signed by you and the next holder. Don't give waste to someone who can't prove they are a legitimate waste-carrier, as they are likely to dump your rubbish to avoid paying-waste disposal costs.

Always obtain a waste-transfer note as proof and, if in any doubt,

call our incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60, Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111, or alternatively use the online form at www.crimestoppers-uk.org.

Using illegal waste dealers may seem tempting in terms of cost, but it can help fund organised crime. All businesses have a responsibility for their commercial waste, and if your waste is found at an illegal site, you could be facing unlimited fines at court. We encourage firms to familiarise themselves with their duty of care: <https://www.gov.uk/managing-your-waste-an-overview>.

Waste crime drains the UK economy of £1 billion each year in clean-up costs and lost tax revenues. It has a devastating effect on the environment and local communities, with pest infestations and fires, which could lead to water and land contamination, plus air pollution from smoke.

The Environment Agency has closed two illegal waste sites a day on average in the past year, seizing a number of vehicles connected with waste crime across the UK. New waste powers mean tougher action can be taken to reduce criminal waste activity – making a real difference to communities.

The Environment Agency can crush seized vehicles under the powers granted by the Control of Waste (Dealing with Seized Property) Regulations 2015.

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