

Scotland's dry cleaning sector improves its environmental performance

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Dry cleaners in Scotland are improving their environmental performance following the introduction of fixed monetary penalties by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

SEPA served £600 fixed monetary penalties on two dry cleaner operators for failure to submit annual solvent emission data as required by their permit.

“Dry Cleaners use solvent as the cleaning medium in their process and, as such, are required to hold a permit to operate,” explains SEPA Environmental Protection Officer Peter Semple. “The solvent used can be harmful to both human health and the environment, with the UK reporting the amount used to the EU. There is a solvent emission limit set in the permit and each operator is required to submit a data return each year to show if they have complied with the limit or not.”

Historically, many operators did not submit the data, with fewer than 80% doing so in 2012.

In response, SEPA adopted a sector-based approach for the regulation of dry cleaners, moving to a national team with one dedicated staff member. This meant more time and effort could be spent supporting the dry cleaning sector. As a result, the number of operators submitting the required data rose to around 90% over the next few years.

SEPA is changing the way it regulates and since 2015, new legal powers have allowed the agency to issue fines for non-compliance as fixed monetary penalties. These have proven effective in changing behaviour and deterring those who damage the environment and undermine legitimate businesses.

“SEPA is clear that compliance with environmental legislation is non-negotiable,” Semple says.

“We’ve spent considerable time and effort engaging with the dry cleaning sector, offering advice and guidance. All operators were advised that they could face a fixed monetary penalty for non-submission of 2017 data. This was also discussed with some local councils, dry cleaning consultants, machine distributors and service engineers, in line with SEPA’s focus on business engagement.”

The number of operators submitting their data return subsequently increased to around 95% in 2017, with just seven failing to do so. Two of these had mitigating circumstances whilst a further three had legal issues with their permit, which have now been resolved. Fixed monetary penalties of £600 each were served on the remaining two operators for failure to submit the required

data return.

Advice and guidance for dry cleaners, including [weekly](#) and [annual](#) data sheets which operators can use to record their data, and the [dry cleaner standard rules](#), which all dry cleaners must comply with, can be found on the [SEPA website](#).

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