

SEPA joins forces with UK agency and industry partners to drive out waste crime

04 October 2018

Illegal cross-border waste haulage and disposal is the target of a series of new multi-agency interventions as part of the £3.8m LIFE SMART Waste project, which is led by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and co-funded by the European Union.

In tandem with police forces across Britain and the English, Welsh and Northern Irish environment agencies, the Drive out waste crime initiative involves a series of road stops, site visits and awareness-raising activity to remind hauliers of their responsibilities relating to waste haulage and disposal.

Waste crime is estimated to cost the UK economy around £600m a year and is known to include trans-border activity, including the illegal transport and dumping of waste in Scotland by hauliers travelling from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Intelligence gathered by the LIFE SMART Waste project indicates that waste is being hauled from England and Wales and illegally deposited in Scotland," said Kath McDowall, Unit Manager in SEPA's Waste Crime Investigations Team.

"Several companies are known to be involved and many of these are under investigation by SEPA's Waste Crime Investigation Team for criminal offences. There are also indications of serious and organised crime group involvement in the transport, sale and disposal of illegal waste – so it's vital that we work with partners across the UK to tackle this issue.

"As Scotland's environmental regulator, SEPA works to protect and enhance Scotland's environment and we are clear that compliance is non-negotiable. Waste crime will not be tolerated and SEPA will, with its partners, pursue and take proportionate action against those who seek to profit from waste crime."

The Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency are SEPA's partner enforcement agencies on the waste crime activity, alongside Police Scotland and forces in England and Wales, British Transport Police, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), Office of the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland, HM Revenue and Customs and the Scottish Business Resilience Centre.

SEPA's trade partners for the Drive out waste crime campaign include the Freight Transport Association, Road Haulage Association, Transport Association and British International Freight Association, with further industry dissemination support from the National Farmers Union, AXA Insurance, Zurich Insurance and the British Insurers Brokers Association (BIBA).

Road Stops

The action on waste crime has included two days of out-of-hours road stops on 20 and 21 September on the A75 at Glenluce in Dumfries and Galloway, specifically targeting lorries and vans travelling to and from ferry crossings to Northern Ireland. These aimed to gather intelligence on waste crime including metal theft, and were led by British Transport Police as part of Operation MODE. This is part of UK-wide Transport Threat Theme activity, where partners are working together across transport modes to tackle serious and organised crime. British Transport Police's Transport Threat Theme partners are Border Force, SEPA, DVSA, HM Revenue and Customs, Immigration Enforcement, Police Scotland (including Roads Policing and Borders Policing Command), and the Scottish Business Resilience Centre.

Metal theft is estimated to cost the UK at least £220m a year. Since September 2016, it has been illegal in Scotland (under the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015) to trade scrap metal for cash or accept scrap metal without verifying the identity of the seller. Similar laws are in place across England and Wales and Northern Ireland.

When criminals strip and re-sell metal from railways, utility companies and properties, it can cause damage and disruption to lives and businesses that far exceeds the costs of the commodity stolen," said Detective Inspector Arlene Wilson of the British Transport Police, which is the national policing lead on metal theft in Scotland, England and Wales.

"Hauliers may be committing an offence by transporting or illegally disposing of metal or other waste without the required permissions and this could leave them liable to prosecution and operational sanctions.

"Criminals often believe they can escape the law by crossing the border into another jurisdiction. But with multi-agency partners working together and sharing intelligence across the UK, this just isn't the case. Working with SEPA and its partners, the British Transport Police is determined to tackle this problem."

A third multi-agency road stop took place yesterday, 3 October, at Gretna Services on the A74 (M) and A1 to address cross-border activity including the illegal dumping of waste and transport of other potential illicit goods, alongside road traffic offences. This involved both SEPA and Environment Agency officers conducting joint duty of care and waste carrier checks on

vehicles crossing the border. Natural Resources Wales, British Transport Police, DVSA, Police Scotland, Scottish Business Resilience Centre and HMRC were also involved.

Site visit

The waste crime activity has also included a site visit, on 1 October, to a scrap metal site in the Lanarkshire area. The specific aim of this visit was to look for possible signs of metal theft or stolen vehicles. The visit was led by British Transport Police alongside SEPA, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service and DVSA.

Awareness-raising activity

As part of the initiative, SEPA has created a Drive out waste crime flyer that has been handed out at road checks and placed in service stations and truck stops on the M74 and A1. The flyer is available in alternative languages and warns hauliers that:

- Anyone who produces, stores and manages waste is obligated to ensure it does not cause harm to human health or pollution to the environment under waste regulations and Duty of Care* legislation.
- You may be committing an offence by transporting or illegally disposing of waste without the required permissions and this could leave you liable to prosecution and operating sanctions.
- Failure to obey the law could result in conviction, a fine of up to £40,000, the loss of your operating licence and a jail sentence.

The flyer is also being distributed by SEPA's project partners, including the Scottish Business Resilience Centre, British Insurance Brokers Association, Axa, Zurich, National Farmers Union Scotland, , Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, DVSA, HMRC, Road Haulage Association, Fleet Transport Association, Transport Association, British Institute of Freight Forwarders, Chartered Institution of Wastes Management, Environmental Services Association and Scottish Environmental Services Association. Members of SEPA's LIFE SMART Waste Expert Group including Natural Resources Wales and Northern Ireland Environment Agency will also distribute the flyer through their websites and internal structures.

Other awareness raising activity includes digital, social media and press activity by SEPA, with support from agency and industry partners during October.

Lynsae Tulloch, Chief Operating Officer of the Scottish Business Resilience Centre, explained how the impact of illegal waste was far-reaching.

Illegal waste management is a blight on our environment, our local communities and businesses. These illegal waste sites mean foul odours, water pollution, pest infestations and the increased risk of fire, which results in essential funds from the public purse being diverted to cover the clean-up costs.

“Critically, criminals involved in the illegal movement and disposal of waste are diverting income from legitimate operators, depriving them of turnover. Some haulage firms are also being used to transport waste to disposal sites – without them even knowing they’re involved in illegal activity.

Tulloch explained how safeguards can minimise the risk of waste criminals: “When negotiating waste haulage contracts, ensure you fully comply with waste duty of care regulations. Always check in advance that the delivery site is authorised to accept the proposed type and amount of waste. We encourage all businesses to continue to be vigilant and report any suspicious transfers or disposals by rogue operators.”

The Drive out waste crime flyer is available on the SEPA website: [English version](#)

***Duty of Care is a code of practice set out in environmental law (Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (as amended)) that legally requires any business, not-for-profit organisation, or public sector body to store and dispose of their waste in a responsible manner.**

About LIFE SMART Waste

LIFE SMART Waste is a £3.8m EU co-funded project, led by SEPA, with the aim of demonstrating innovative ways of understanding, tackling and reducing waste-related crime. LSW is committed to undertaking three intelligence-led waste crime interventions to test the project’s newly developed tools and approaches. The first of these focused on the illegal warehousing of waste and took part in December 2017 in partnership with Crimestoppers, the independent charity that helps the police to solve crimes. The Drive out waste crime initiative is the second intervention, with the third intervention still in planning.