

Press release: Oxfordshire business fined for waste permit offences

Storage and disposal breaches by Woodstock business.

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The operator of waste sites near Woodstock has been fined £17,000 after ignoring several warnings to comply with the law.

John Sheehan (Oxford) Ltd failed to handle waste materials properly at its facilities in Glympton.

Waste at landfill sites produces a liquid known as leachate as the rubbish decomposes. The company, however, didn't control the leachate within acceptable levels between 2013 and 2016, leaving open the risk of pollution.

The Environment Agency found other offences at the sites. It repeatedly warned the company it was breaching the terms of its permits for handling plasterboard at its landfill site, and asbestos at its waste transfer station.

Oxford Crown court heard the company disposed of plasterboard at the landfill site between January and August 2015. Putting plasterboard in landfill sites like that run by John Sheehan was banned in 2005 due to the risk of the waste producing noxious and toxic gases.

The waste transfer station stored asbestos for 12 weeks from October 2014, way beyond the week-long limit allowed by its permit. Asbestos is a hazardous waste subject to strict controls on handling and storage.

Colin Chiverton, Environment Manager in Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley for the Environment Agency, said:

This £17,000 fine should send out a powerful message that permit breaches are very serious, and the Environment Agency will take appropriate enforcement action if warnings are ignored.

Permits are issued for a purpose – to reduce the risk working with waste may have on the environment. We will always help companies comply with their permit. However, operators cannot simply overlook the law, risking pollution incidents.

The landfill site and waste transfer station are due to close later this year, but the company has funded improved leachate management since the Environment Agency took enforcement action, and will continue to monitor gas emissions after it closes.

Judge Nigel Daly, sitting at Oxford Crown court on 23 April 2019, described John Sheehan's failure to properly manage leachate levels as "reckless", calling the company's handling of plasterboard and asbestos "negligent".

In addition to the fine, Judge Daly ordered the company to pay costs of £25,000.

John Sheehan (Oxford) Ltd pleaded guilty to breaching an environmental permit contrary to regulation 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations (England and Wales) 2016 between November 2013 and August 2016, for each of handling leachate, plasterboard and asbestos.

The court gave credit to John Sheehan for its guilty pleas, and acknowledged the company had no previous convictions.

Speech: Committee on Climate Change 'Net Zero' report

Everyone knows that when you appoint John Gummer to chair this important committee you are going to get rigour, you are going to get passion, and you are going to be challenged.

But you are also going to get the sense that we can drive ourselves to achieve what you set out. And we are absolutely determined to do it.

I just want to say a few things to set the scene for Chris' introduction of his report.

The first is to thank you for the huge work that's gone into this request that we made in the full knowledge that we would have rigour, we would have science, we would have the authority that the Committee draws on and always expresses.

We will study the recommendations very carefully. But it's evident already that this is going to be one of the most important publications not just that we've had on climate in this country but around the world.

It is a seminal work and draws on the very latest climate science and its impact will be felt for decades to come.

In recent weeks people from all walks of life and all sections of society

have set out the stark and uncompromising case for further action to protect our planet. I applaud them.

I think this report is being launched at a time of great national and international commitment and determination to see greater action.

One of our proudest achievements as a country is that – with all political parties uniting, and civil society coming together – we have led the world in tackling climate change.

Since the year 2000 no country in the G20 has gone further than Britain in decarbonising their economy.

Six years ago, 40% of our electricity generated came from coal.

When I checked my Gridwatch app this morning there wasn't a single contribution from coal being generated. Across the year it's typically now less than 5%, while the world's biggest offshore windfarms can be found off our coasts.

We are still building many of the key pillars of a net-zero economy mentioned in today's report.

From making plans to have the first Carbon Capture and Storage operational from the mid-2020s.

To our mission to halve the energy use of new buildings by 2030 and establishing the first zero-carbon Industrial Cluster by 2040.

But while all this is necessary, it is not sufficient.

We know we must do more – and we will do more.

In 2008 I was the opposition spokesman during the passage of the Climate Change Act. Through the passage of the bill the 60% reduction target to 80%.

And that was the first law in the world to set a legally binding carbon reduction targets.

More than a decade later our ambition – far from having diminished – is strengthened.

We want to be the first major economy to legislate for a net zero emissions target.

It is the start of a new phase to eradicate our contribution to global warming once and for all.

As we consider how we reach net zero we must listen to – and be guided by – the science.

That's why we commissioned the report in October. That the substance of this report has been put together since then is a tribute to the professionalism and dedication of John and Chris, and their team.

It is a comprehensive and ground-breaking report and we will commit to responding in a timeframe which reflects the urgency of the issue.

In the years ahead the battle to halt catastrophic climate change will be won or will be lost.

We intend to win.

Here in the UK, we want to do more than just 'play our part'.

We want to lead from the front.

Today's report is part of that.

So in this crucial moment for our planet we should be united in our determination to tackle the climate emergency vigorously at home and show that leadership abroad.

It is a great honour and fills me with great pride to be here.

Thank for you very much.

Press release: Pony and trapped!

Firm fined after muddy mess halts horse.

Press release: Pony and trapped!

A pony was found up to its belly in thick mud after a Hillingdon company polluted a stream near Heathrow.

Dirty water escaped from a site operated by Arbormaster (UK) Ltd in 2016, when staff washed soil. The muck then travelled into fields and a stream called Mad Bess Brook, between Harefield and Ruislip.

The pony broke free from the sludge, but Arbormaster, of St. Leonards Farm, New Years Green Lane, Harefield, has been fined £3,500 for the incident and failing to obtain a permit from the Environment Agency for the work.

In February 2016, the Environment Agency was asked to investigate reports from members of the public that the River Pinn, some distance away from the Arbormaster plant, had become cloudy at several locations downstream of Ruislip.

Officers were unable to prove the muddy water got into the Pinn, but they traced the pollution back to Mad Bess Brook and St Leonards Farm. Investigators found a large quantity of murky water cascading down the side of a pile of waste soil. The water drained away from the farm via a ditch connected to the stream.

The discoloured liquid was discovered shortly after Arbormaster installed a machine at St Leonards Farm to clean waste soil used in landscaping. The Environment Agency ordered the company to stop the process as a result of the pollution.

District Judge Deborah Wright, sitting at Ealing magistrates' court on 26 April 2019, called the company's actions "reckless". The pollution adversely affected the stream's invertebrate population meant to help sustain wildlife numbers.

James Burton, a senior environment officer for the Environment Agency in London, said:

Pumping large amounts of water into a waste pile without any way of capturing the liquid was inevitably going to cause a problem. Arbormaster knew the water was escaping from the site, yet failed to stop the soil-washing.

The Environment Agency can work with companies to make sure they comply with the law, but enforcement is always open to us. I hope the £3,500 fine sends out a powerful message to businesses that protecting the environment is not an optional extra. It's a must.

All commercial waste activities are regulated by the Environment Agency. Whenever waste is stored or treated, the operator is required to hold an environmental permit or register for an exemption, which is reserved for low-risk waste activities only.

Arbormaster pleaded guilty to the charges.

In addition to the £3,500 fine, the court ordered the company to pay costs of £5,000 and a victim surcharge of £170.

Arbormaster (UK) Ltd was charged with breaching regulations 12 (1) (a) and 38 (1) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016, for not possessing a permit, and regulation 12 (1) (b) and 38 (1) (a) for undertaking a water-discharge activity without the required permit.