

Press release: 'Right Waste, Right Place' spot-checks on Thames Valley waste firms

Updated: Updated summary.

A number of businesses across Berkshire and Buckinghamshire are on notice to comply with the law on waste disposal, after a series of unannounced checks by the Environment Agency on Tuesday 3 October.

Officers visited more than 100 sites and firms across the Thames Valley, and will be following-up on 10 illegal waste sites found during the day. The owners may face prosecution. Other premises were given advice and guidance to help them meet their legal requirements.

Firms are required by law to manage waste without a threat to the environment, such as not releasing anything other than waste water into the drainage network. The surprise inspections covered the removal of hazardous items, like chemicals and car batteries. Thames Water assisted the Environment Agency on pollution checks. Companies were also checked for having the correct environmental permit for their business.

Environment Agency staff were also on hand at DIY store Wickes in Slough, to offer free waste-handling advice to hauliers and homeowners, in order to reduce fly-tipping.

Mark Tucker, Installations Team Leader for the Environment Agency in the Thames Valley, said:

The Environment Agency works with business to make sure waste ends up in the right place, and may take more formal action where we believe a serious crime has been committed through illegal waste disposal.

Anyone who produces, carries, keeps, treats or disposes of waste has a duty of care to make sure it is managed correctly. The public can do their bit by only using a licenced waste carrier, or reporting any concerns on waste management to the Environment Agency on 0800 807060.

The 117 sites we inspected this week were under no illusion of their legal obligations on waste management. Mishandling waste, poorly-operated permitted sites and illegal waste activities can pose a threat to human health and the environment by contaminating land, polluting rivers and producing emissions from burning waste.

As well as breaking the law, illegal operations undermine the work

done by legitimate firms.

Waste crime is a very serious issue for both local communities and the environment. The Environment Agency uses reports from industry and the public to build intelligence, and target those involved in organised environmental crime, and where their activities pose the greatest risk to the environment.

Handling of illegal waste can be reported anonymously to Crimestoppers, on 0800 555111. There are lots of signs that could suggest suspicious activity. These include:

- Out-of-hours activity at night, over weekends and during bank holidays
- Smoke caused by constant burning
- An increase in the number of lorries entering a site
- Waste going into a site but not coming out with increasing quantities of waste stockpiled on site
- Water pollution

The Environment Agency and local councils also investigate reports of fly-tipping.

All media enquiries: 0800 141 2743.

Or email us at southeastpressooffice1@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Press release: Thames Barrier to close due to high tide

Communities are warned to be prepared for a coastal surge which is forecast today. As a precaution the Environment Agency will close the Thames Barrier at 10am and re-open it at 4pm (5 October 2017) to reduce the risk of possible flooding in London and along the Thames catchment.

During today's closure the Thames Barrier, along with the associated gates and embankments, will be operating as part of our network of defences, protecting over 550,000 properties. The Thames Barrier is one of the largest moveable flood barriers in the world, protecting 125 square kilometres of central London.

It stretches 520 metres across the River Thames at Charlton and each gate takes 10 to 15 minutes to close (1.5 hours for total closure), and the control room is manned 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Andrew Batchelor, Thames Barrier Manager said:

We are closing the Thames Barrier to protect London from the threat of flooding due to high water levels around the time of high tides from the sea.

Practical advice on preparing for flooding can be found on GOV.UK or by calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188. Communities can also follow us on Twitter at [@EnvAgencySE](https://twitter.com/EnvAgencySE) and #floodaware for the latest flood updates.

For all media enquiries please contact 0800 141 2743 or email southeastpressoffice1@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Press release: £50 million flood defence scheme opens in Leeds

A £50 million flood alleviation scheme in Leeds which uses moveable weir technology – a first for flood risk reduction in the UK – has opened today (4 October 2017).

The first phase of the award-winning Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme not only uses state-of-the-art flood defence engineering techniques but is one of the largest river flood alleviation schemes in the country.

Led by Leeds City Council in partnership with the Environment Agency, the scheme will provide more than 3,000 homes, 500 businesses and 300 acres of development land with increased protection against flooding from the River Aire and Hol Beck.

More than 22,000 jobs will be safeguarded over the next 10 years due to the increased level of protection and through the scheme's development and construction, 150 jobs and apprenticeships have been created.

It comprises three main elements: state-of-the-art mechanical weirs, the merging of the river and canal and flood walls and embankments stretching 4.5km through the city centre.

The scheme, which sees work on the River Aire now substantially complete and work at Holbeck continuing into autumn, is being officially opened by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Judith Blake CBE and Chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Howard Boyd.

Multiple funding streams have contributed towards the cost of this £50 million scheme, including £35 million of government Grant in Aid funding alongside £10 million of local funding from Leeds City Council and partnership funding from Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership and others.

Government is spending £2.5 billion to protect a further 300,000 homes by 2021.

Leader of Leeds City Council Judith Blake CBE said:

We are delighted to see this much-needed first phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme opened. As could be seen by the devastation at Christmas 2015, providing increased flood protection in Leeds is essential in terms of reassuring our residents and businesses, and this fantastic state-of-the-art scheme provides it for the city centre and downstream at Woodlesford. The clever use of the mechanical weirs is a brilliant idea, and they have also brought about environmental benefits with the improved river quality bringing salmon and otters, while the new bridge looks stunning offering great views of the river and beyond as part of the Trans Pennine Trail.

We'd like to thank everyone involved in this phase of the scheme and look forward to developing the plans for phase two and beyond, as only through an entire catchment and citywide approach can we protect all communities in Leeds from the threat of flooding.

Chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Howard Boyd said:

This ground-breaking scheme will not only benefit hundreds of homes and businesses in the city but it will also safeguard 22,000 jobs over the next 10 years due to the increased level of protection it provides. It's been great to see Leeds City Council and the Environment Agency working together in partnership to better protect the city – and it is one of many schemes in the Defra programme investing £430 million to reduce flood risk across Yorkshire before 2021.

We're always looking for new ways that we can use technology to reduce flood risk so it's exciting that this scheme is also a first for flood risk management in the UK thanks to the use of the moveable weirs which can be lowered when river levels are high. On a day-to-day basis, people won't even know they are being protected, and they can enjoy the river which is a key aspect of the city's South Bank regeneration plans.

Floods minister, Thérèse Coffey said:

No one can forget the devastating flooding residents and businesses in Leeds faced nearly two years ago. We know how distressing flooding is for all those affected and I'm delighted that through this new state-of-the-art £50 million scheme thousands more people living and working in Leeds will be better protected.

Our commitment to strengthening flood defences across Yorkshire doesn't stop here – we are investing £430 million over six years up until 2021 to better protect the region using the best technology and engineering available.

It is the first time that moveable weirs have been used in the UK for flood alleviation purposes. The new weir gates are supported by giant inflatable neoprene bladders that can be lowered when high river flows are expected. It takes around two hours for the gates to lower, and thanks to the installation of these weir gates, it has been possible to keep flood defence wall heights to a minimum so as not to spoil views of the city centre waterfront.

The weirs have been installed at Crown Point in the city centre and further downstream at Knostrop, where a new locally manufactured bridge has been installed across the weir connecting the diverted Trans Pennine Trail with the north bank of the river.

Weighing approximately 150 tonnes and spanning approximately 70 metres, the bridge has been designed by Knight Architects, ARUP and BMMjv (a joint venture between BAM Nuttall and Mott MacDonald). It has been positioned to provide dramatic views of the weir gates. The very narrow piers and curving underside of the bridge deck are designed to give the bridge a slender appearance when viewed from up or downstream.

The new footbridge reconnects the much-used Trans Pennine Trail to the north bank of the river, providing users with a gateway into Leeds.

In addition to these measures, the removal of a manmade island, known locally at Knostrop Cut, which separated the canal and river has been removed to improve a bottleneck for flows. 180,000 tonnes of material excavated from the site has been reused on a local development site and also on diverting the Trans Pennine Trail which previously went across the manmade island. Reusing this material has saved the project in the region of £6 million.

The earlier stages of the scheme included work at Woodlesford further downstream, which were completed in 2015 and proved effective during the December 2015 floods.

Environmental enhancements have been integral within the scheme design with fish and eel passes installed at both weirs.

Weirs have previously been barriers, preventing species such as salmon migrating from the sea to the spawning grounds further up the river. Salmon have recently been spotted in the River Aire for the first time in 200 years, and now that fish passes have been installed on Knostrop and Crown Point weirs, as well as others on the River Aire, it is hoped that chances of a spawning population of salmon in the river in future will be increased.

Otter ramps and holts have also been installed and will support the local population and 700 trees will be planted along the Trans Pennine Trail later this autumn.

Roger Marsh OBE, Chair of the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP), said:

The LEP, alongside Leeds City Council, the Environment Agency and other funding partners, moved quickly to improve flood protection in Leeds following the Boxing Day floods of 2015.

Local Growth Deal funding into the flood alleviation scheme helped to improve the standard of protection for the city while our £5m Business Flood Recovery Fund, launched just weeks after floods hit, supported businesses to reopen and local SMEs to get back on their feet.

Safeguarding businesses and residents from issues such as flooding is integral to growing an economy and the opening of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme Phase One today is a huge step forward in helping businesses flourish in what is fast becoming one the busiest economic areas of the City Region.

December 2015 saw Leeds experience significant and widespread flooding with some of the highest river levels ever recorded. The flooding affected nearly 3,000 residential properties (including indirect impacts to high-rise accommodation) and 700 commercial properties.

A consultation on the second phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme is now open until 16 November, to provide increased flood protection to communities upstream of the city centre. proposals include measures further upstream including the Kirkstall corridor which was badly hit by the floods as well as Stourton, an industrial area that was badly affected on Boxing Day 2015.

[Press release: Pengwedna poultry farm public consultation now live](#)

The Environment Agency has received a permit application from Richland Foods who want to operate an egg-laying chicken farm at Pengwedna Poultry Farm, Nancegollan, Helston, Cornwall TR13 0AZ.

The Environment Agency will be holding a public drop-in event at Nancegollan village hall on Wednesday 18 October 2017 from 10am until 8pm. This is an opportunity to find out more about the environmental permit application and to give your views.

The environmental permit relates to the control of emissions from the

facility on the environment and on people's health. It does not relate to issues such as the choice of location of the site, traffic movements to/from site, visual impact, operating hours and light pollution. These matters are considered through Cornwall Council's planning application process.

The environmental permit application will consider:

- management – including general management, accident management, energy efficiency, efficient use of raw materials and waste recovery
- operations – including permitted activities and operating techniques (use of poultry feed, housing design and management, slurry spreading and manure management planning)
- emissions – to water, air and land including to groundwater and fugitive emissions, transfers off site, odour, noise (including vehicles and machinery onsite) and vibration, and monitoring

The environmental permit focuses on the assessment of activities and emissions from within the site boundary.

The consultation is an opportunity for local people to give their views on this permit application (reference EPR/QP3835YS/A001). You can view the [permit application and supporting documents](#) and see a paper copy at Sir John Moore House, Victoria Square, Bodmin PL31 1EB.

Send your comments by 1 November 2017 (11:59pm), either online, or by email to pscpublicresponse@environment-agency.gov.uk, or in writing to:

Environment Agency Permitting and Support Centre

Land Team

Quadrant 2

99 Parkway Avenue

Sheffield

S9 4WF

[General information about permitting.](#)

Notes to editor

The planning application can be viewed using Cornwall Council's online planning register. Cornwall Council's Local Planning Team can be contacted by telephone on 0300 1234 151 or via email at planning@cornwall.gov.uk.

Press release: Bristol company fined for hazardous waste offences

They were fined for illegally supplying thousands of tonnes of hazardous waste to a development site in Avonmouth.

The sentencing follows a 5 year Environment Agency investigation into Churngold Recycling Ltd and 2 of its directors, John Barcham and Lee Phelan. Codenamed 'Operation Durable', the investigation culminated in a 9 week trial at Bristol Crown Court earlier this year.

Churngold operated a waste transfer site at Hallen Yard on the Severn View Industrial Estate, Avonmouth, where it supplied soil and aggregate for the building industry. Waste was collected from sites across the UK and stored and treated at Hallen Yard.

The company operated under a waste management licence, issued by the Environment Agency. This controlled the types of waste accepted at the transfer station and the activities permitted at the site.

In June 2011, Churngold was awarded a contract to remove hazardous waste from a site in Oxford where the car company, BMW, discovered extensive contamination under a building during re-developing its Cowley factory. Trial pits and testing revealed high levels of heavy metals, hydrocarbons and asbestos contaminated materials.

Churngold was paid £750 per load to remove the hazardous waste to its yard in Avonmouth for treatment prior to it being used as a building material. Between July to September 2011, a total of 31,000 tonnes of waste was brought from Cowley to Churngold's waste transfer station in Avonmouth. The volume of waste kept increasing and very quickly exceeded the transfer station's limit of 6,000 tonnes.

Around the same time, Churngold was awarded a contract to supply 60,000 tonnes of aggregate to the site of a new Co-operative supermarket distribution centre at Cabot Park, Avonmouth. The aggregate would be mixed with inert material that had gone through a 'stabilisation process' making it suitable for use as a building material.

On 7 September 2011 Churngold delivered the first load to the Co-op site. Over the next fortnight it transported a total of 64,000 tonnes (2,751 loads) to the new distribution centre site.

Ground-workers at the Co-op site said the Churngold material gave them 'runny and sore eyes'. One worker said it smelt like 'faeces and bleach' and 'took his breath away.' Others described the clay-like material as 'smelling like a hospital'.

Waste from the BMW site in Oxford had undergone partial treatment to remove asbestos materials, but some asbestos remained and it was still hazardous

when it arrived at the Churngold's Hallen Yard in Avonmouth. The company was told the waste required further treatment.

As operations manager, Lee Phelan would have been fully aware of the requirements of the transfer station's permit conditions. Failure by Churngold to fully treat the waste, potentially exposed staff and visitors to Hallen Yard and ground-workers at the Co-op site to health risks from the asbestos.

Churngold's environment manager became concerned after discovering the hazardous nature of the BMW car plant waste. She told Barcham and Phelan it was 'untreatable'. They repeatedly ignored her warnings.

On 22 September 2011 a former Churngold employee notified the Co-op that contaminated material had been delivered to their new distribution centre at Cabot Park. Subsequent analysis revealed the presence of asbestos in 47 of 60 samples, high levels of total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPH), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) as well as significant levels of leachable lead, cyanide, copper, antimony and total sulphate concentrations that posed a risk to groundwater and nearby watercourses.

Barcham was described as a 'domineering character' who liked to micro manage. Nothing would happen without his say so or knowledge including where treated waste went after treatment. He once told the company's environment manager, 'We don't tell the EA what we are doing, we do it and then tell them how we've done it.'

The company failed to inform the Environment Agency of the massive amount of hazardous material being stockpiled at Hallen Yard or where it had come from. The sheer volume of materials arriving at the site made it impossible to segregate or treat them properly. This caused the site to breach its permit.

The Environment Agency had earlier advised Churngold that waste containing heavy metals remains hazardous even after it has undergone a stabilisation process. The court heard that while Phelan had worked in the waste industry, he had no qualifications or experience of treating hazardous waste.

Work on the Co-op site was suspended on 1 December 2011 following publication of the analysis report. The Environment Agency confirmed the material was illegally deposited hazardous waste and that it should be removed to a suitable waste facility for safe disposal.

The Environment Agency investigation revealed that Churngold had also illegally disposed of hazardous waste including asbestos, railway sleepers, plastic, metal pipes, vehicle tyres and foam pipe lagging at a second site, Minors Farm, Severnside.

Adrian Evans, for the Environment Agency, said:

Hazardous waste must be handled and treated with great care to safeguard human health and the environment. This case shows the Environment Agency will take serious action against people who fail

to comply with the law.

Churngold Recycling Ltd had a culture where commercial gain was given priority over environmental protection. We hope this prosecution sends out a strong deterrent message to others who flout the law.

Churngold Recycling Limited, John Barcham and Lee Phelan faced a total of 10 charges under the Environment Protection Act 1990 and Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010 at a 9 week trial that started in May 2017.

Judge James Patrick QC said “the treatment of the waste was unscientific and amateur” and that the defendants showed a “flagrant disregard for the law”.

The company was found guilty of 4 offences. John Barcham was found guilty of 1 offence and Lee Phelan convicted of 3 offences. There were 3 not guilty verdicts and the jury failed to reach a verdict on the 2 remaining charges.

The judge praised the Environment Agency for the quality of their professional investigation.

Summary of convictions:

Churngold Recycling Ltd:

- Between 1 July to 31 December 2011, failed to comply with conditions of permit at Hallen Yard, Avonmouth, an offence under Reg 38(2) under the Environmental Permitting Regulations: £12,000 fine
- Between 1 September to 31 September 2011, deposited controlled waste at the Co-operative Site, Cabot Park, Avonmouth without a permit contrary to Section 33(1)(a) and 33(6) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: £3,000 fine
- Between 1 January to 31 December 2011, treated, kept or disposed of controlled waste in a manner likely to cause pollution or harm to human health contrary to Sections 33(1)© and 33(6) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: £5,000 fine
- Between 1 June to 31 December 2011, deposited controlled waste at Minors Farms, Hallen, Bristol contrary to Section 33(1)(a) and 33(6) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: £2,450 fine

John Barcham:

- Between 1 July to 31 December 2011, failed to comply with, or contravention of, a Waste Management Permit condition contrary to Regulation 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010: 6 months suspended for 12 months and costs of £10,000
- John Barcham ordered to carry out 75 hours of unpaid work

Lee Phelan:

- Between 1 July to 31 December 2011, failed to comply with, or contravention of, a Waste Management Permit condition contrary to

Regulation 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010: 6 months suspended for 12 months

- Between 1 September and 30 September 2011, deposited controlled waste on land without a permit contrary to Section 33(1)(a) and 33(6) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: 1 month suspended for 12 months
- Between 1 January to 31 December 2011, treated, kept or disposed of controlled waste in a manner likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health contrary to Section 33(1)(c) and 33(6) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: 1 month suspended for 12 months
- Lee Phelan ordered to carry out 100 hours unpaid work