

Suspended sentences for 2 men who burned waste on Northampton site

David Wells, 41 of Fretter Close, Broughton Astley, Leicestershire and Daniel Hancock, 32 of Gull Crescent Northampton, repeatedly ignored warnings by the Environment Agency. They were sentenced to 8 months in prison, suspended for 2 years, and each ordered to perform 100 hours of unpaid work.

The pair, who had previously pleaded guilty, were ordered to pay £4,900 in costs at Northampton Crown Court following an investigation by the Environment Agency.

The court heard how both had been storing and burning waste without environmental permits at a site on the edge of the village of Boughton. Nearby residents reported toxic fumes and seeing flames coming from the Boughton Springs site.

During lockdown of spring and summer 2020, witnesses reported 'very thick dense smoke and very smelly' and 'acidic and very toxic'. Reports of fires that were 'frequent and troublesome' and smoke with 'a very unpleasant odour', were also reported.

Neighbours explained they were unable to sit in their gardens, hang out washing or open their windows. One elderly neighbour experienced breathing difficulty when fires were in progress.

Environment Officers visited on several occasions to warn and provide advice on what material could be burnt legally. Despite these visits, the pair continued to burn material without permission and to store mixed waste illegally on the site.

In February 2021, officers visited unannounced after further blazes were reported. On arrival they found a fire made up of green waste in plastic bags, laminated wood, furniture, cans, and other general waste.

Officers at the scene described the smoke from the fire as black, with a 'toxic' smell.

Piles of items including toilets, scrap metal, 3 metres squared of spent printer cartridges, sacks of domestic waste, carpets, toys and clothes were found at the site. Much of the waste was stored on bare ground, risking contamination to soil and water, creating an odour problem and attracting flies and vermin.

In July, the pair were still storing illegal mixed waste in defiance of officers' advice. The Environment Agency, the court heard, had no alternative but to prosecute.

Environment Agency prosecutor, Sarah Dunne, said:

Officers had made every effort to work with the men to help them comply with the law.

Their activities had harmed the environment, impacted upon lawful competitors and undermined the Environment Agency's attempts to regulate and protect the environment.

Sentencing Wells and Hancock, Her Honour Judge Lucking QC said:

The pair's 'lucrative' business had had 'an impact on other people's mental health and well-being.

If the pair were back before the court for further environmental offences, they risked immediate custody. They had demonstrated a 'resistant attitude' to the Environment Agency and a 'flagrant disregard' for the law.

Paul Salter, Environmental Crime Officer at the Environment Agency, said:

David Wells and Daniel Hancock's convictions show how seriously we take the issue of waste crime.

This burning of waste blighted the community throughout lockdown, causing residents misery. The men were advised on many occasions as to how to store and safely manage their waste but refused to comply.

The burning of waste must be done in a sustainable and properly managed way that mitigates any impact on the local community. This was not done in this case.

Anyone with suspicions of waste crime can call our incident hotline, 0800 807060, or Crimestoppers, on 0800 555111.