

[News story: Brakes are off as reactor clean-up moves forward](#)

Engineers also used the wheels from a kitchen can opener, attached to the handbrake, to help steer a camera inside the Prototype Fast Reactor (PFR) for a survey inside the plant.

Conditions inside the reactor make it impossible for workers to access, meaning photographs taken by the piece of kit help in understanding how best to go about dismantling the redundant facility.

Chris Irwin, Senior Design Engineer, came up with the innovative concept. He said:

I was opening a can of beans at home and realised that the cutting wheel of a can opener was exactly what was needed to make the required diamond-shaped wheel.

I bought four of them and took the wheels off. The camera needed to be guided over obstacles within the reactor, so we realised the incremental nature of the clicks on a handbrake would give us the precise control that we needed.

This is the latest in a long line of novel approaches developed by the company's workforce, with blu-tack and Cillit Bang among the everyday items that have previously been used to help deliver safe and cost-effective clean-up on behalf of the site's owner, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

We are delivering one of the most challenging closure programmes in Europe, but this is another example where innovative, simple solutions prove critical in safely delivering complex projects.

PFR is one of three reactors at the former centre of fast reactor research. It was closed down in 1994, 20 years after it began producing power.

[Press release: Farmer fined for illegal waste site](#)

A County Durham man has been convicted of operating an illegal waste site in a prosecution brought by the Environment Agency.

Stephen Anthony Suddes, 53, appeared at Newton Aycliffe Magistrate's Court on Wednesday 13 December 2017 for operating a waste facility without a permit at his Thornley Pit House farm in Bishop Auckland.

Suddes, who has two previous convictions for waste offences, admitted the charges. He was handed a fine of £1,640 and ordered to pay costs of £1,500 and a £165 victim surcharge.

Under the same prosecution, Kevin Gray, 53, of Wear Street, Tow Law, on 6 September pleaded guilty for depositing controlled waste on a site without an environmental permit. He was fined £400 and ordered to pay £1,000 costs.

Acting on behalf of the Environment Agency, solicitor Laura Taylor told the court that Suddes deliberately and flagrantly disregarded the law over several months.

Environment Agency officers visited Suddes farm several times between 24 May 2016 and 31 October 2016. Each time they observed illegal activity including large piles of waste containing metals, wood, plastics, rubble and soils, and clear signs that waste had been burnt. On two occasions they recorded a white van owned by Kevin Gray Building Services tipping construction and demolition waste on the farm.

David O'Toole of the Environment Agency said:

Suddes has repeatedly put the environment at risk by deliberately ignoring the law for financial gain. Illegal waste activity such as this has a detrimental impact on the community and environment, as well as undermining legitimate businesses. We'll continue to work hard to ensure enforcement action is taken against those who flout the law.

Anyone who suspects that waste is being disposed of on an illegal waste fire is urged to report the matter to our incident hotline on 0800 807060.

[Press release: North East youngster's winning design for flood wardens](#)

A Sunderland youngster flooded with creativity has designed a winning logo for the region's Flood Wardens.

The Environment Agency hosted a special assembly at Hetton Lyons Primary School to present year 5 pupil Sally Lockey with a flood warden jacket.

Her design beat more than 300 submitted across the north east and will now be

printed on all of the new blue flood warden jackets in the region.

And the new logo will also be printed on pavements outside north east schools with Rainworks spray – an invisible spray which will only show the logo when it rains.

It means pupils at the school will be reminded of the importance of being floodaware at key times.

Coun. James Blackburn, Hetton Town Mayor David Wallace, and flood wardens from Durham were at the special assembly to congratulate the youngster.

Winner Sally Lockey with her logo design

Important job for youngsters

Taryn Al-Mashgari, Flood Community Engagement Officer who covers the Tyne and Wear area, said:

The winning logo will be worn by flood wardens right across the north east so it was an important job for these youngsters.

We got more than 300 entries, which is fantastic, and it was tough for the judging panel. But the winning logo incorporated all of the aspects of a flood warden and that's why we chose it.

We're working closely with schools to make sure young people understand what it means to be flood resilient and how they can be prepared, so that communities are prepared for future generations.

We've talked to them about the importance of flood wardens and what they do and it's been fun for the children to come up with this new design.

L-R: Taryn Al-Mashgari, Environment Agency; Flood warden Margaret Horseman; Mayor David Wallace with the flood emergency 'grab bag' given to the school; Flood warden Sue Williams, and Coun. James Blackburn, with logo design winner Sally Lockey wearing the flood warden jacket and with the new Rainworks stencil.

School presentations

Environment Agency Flood Engagement Officers gave presentations at schools across the north east during the competition to raise awareness of flooding with children and start them thinking about how to prepare for flooding.

Sarah Staward, Year 5 teacher at the school, added:

The children really enjoyed learning about flooding and the role and qualities of the Environment Agency flood wardens. The

competition also supports our work as an eco-school.

Flood wardens are community volunteers who support their communities during flooding incidents – including activating a community's flood action plan, ensuring the most vulnerable in their community are safe and working closely with the Environment Agency.

Flood warden Sue Williams, who congratulated Sally at the assembly, said:

These new flood warden jackets are excellent as the blue colour identifies us as flood wardens and distinguishes us from organisations at the scene. The winning symbol is fantastic and captures everything about our role.

[Communities are urged to check their flood risk and find out how they can prepare for flooding](#)

News story: NHS becomes first healthcare system in the world to publish numbers of avoidable deaths

The NHS will become the first healthcare organisation in the world to publish estimates of how many patients may have died because of problems in their care.

The publication follows a promise by the health secretary after a 2016 Care Quality Commission report found that the NHS was missing opportunities to learn from patient deaths, and that too many families were not being included or listened to when an investigation happened.

The data will be published each quarter by individual trusts. 171 of the 223 trusts in England have already released or are releasing their first estimates by the end of December.

Each trust will make its own assessment of the number of deaths due to problems in care. The data will not be comparable and will not be collated centrally. This will allow trusts to focus on learning from mistakes and sharing lessons across their organisations and their local healthcare systems.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Every death resulting from a failing in care is an absolute tragedy, and despite the NHS being ranked as the world's safest healthcare system for a second time, we still have a long way to go.

Too often I have heard from families saying that after mistakes happen they feel like a wall has gone up in the NHS, but publishing this data will help give grieving families the openness and answers they deserve. It marks a significant milestone in ensuring the NHS learns from every tragic case, sharing lessons across the whole system to prevent mistakes recurring and ultimately delivering safer care for all patients in the future.

The programme is likely to cover between 1,250 and 9,000 deaths, which research suggests is the number of deaths each year that may be down to problems in care – a fraction of the 19.7 million treatments and procedures carried out by the NHS in 2016 to 2017.

These deaths range from rare but high-profile failings in care, to those which involve terminally ill patients who die earlier than expected. These deaths may make up a large number of those caused by problems in care, showing the need to continue to focus on improving all care, including end of life care.

By collecting this data and taking action in response to failings in care, NHS trusts and foundation trusts will be able to give grieving families an open and honest account of the circumstances that led to a death. This work is already happening in some parts of the NHS, for example at University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which recently held its first memorial service for those who have died in its care.

The data will allow trusts to learn from every failing in care, and then share lessons across the NHS to better protect patients in the future. For example, the Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, which as part of the Greater Manchester Partnership is working across Greater Manchester on mortality reviews, so that lessons learned are shared with other providers for the good of patients across the area.

Prof Ted Baker, chief inspector of hospitals at the Care Quality Commission, said:

The NHS is the first healthcare system to commit to reporting and publishing information on the number of avoidable deaths in its hospitals and the work that is being done by individual NHS trusts to learn from those deaths.

This new level of transparency will be central to improving care and ensuring the safety of the NHS services we all rely on. We will use this information alongside the findings of our inspections to identify where providers must make improvements and to share good practice where we find hospitals that are doing it well.

We can be proud of the progress made over the past year, but the challenge now is to deliver the full vision of a safer learning culture.

Executive Medical Director of NHS Improvement Dr Kathy McLean said:

NHS trusts are undergoing a culture change in how they learn from deaths. Trusts across the country are improving how they engage and support bereaved families, how they ensure they learn from mistakes and share good practice.

We have been clear that the change required of trust boards is one of culture and leadership, rather than one of process and counting.

Press release: Major investigation smashes nationwide prison drone gang

Ringleader Craig Hickinbottom co-ordinated a gang of 10 others from his prison cell to carry out 49 drone flights into a number of establishments, with some flights carrying individual payloads worth as much as £85,000 behind bars.

A meticulous investigation that involved the analysis of drone and mobile phone data of the defendants – alongside the use of covert cameras to capture them piloting drones outside a prison – led to the criminal empire being dismantled.

The 11 gang members have now been handed sentences totalling over 32 years by a judge at Birmingham Crown Court after either admitting or being found guilty of a range of offences.

Prisons around the West Midlands were repeatedly targeted as part of the drugs conspiracy but analysis of drones used by the gang identified drops at prisons across the country and in Scotland between July 2015 and November 2016.

Stolen cars were used to transport contraband as close to prisons as possible before members of the gang loaded up drones and flew them to specific cell windows for distribution on the inside.

Prisons Minister Sam Gyimah said:

It is clear this gang ran a nationwide drugs operation, using

sophisticated technology to transport substances into our prisons and heap misery onto the offenders they had in their clutches.

We have invested significant resources into boosting our prison intelligence units and I am delighted that their meticulous work – operating jointly with colleagues from law enforcement agencies – is having such a positive impact.

Criminals who involve themselves in this type of behaviour should be left in no doubt that we are continuously developing our means of investigation and will stop at nothing to bring them to justice. This case is clear evidence of the desire our staff have to win the war on drugs in prisons.

DC Andy Farmer, Investigating Officer from West Mercia Police, said:

This was a painstaking and complicated investigation undertaken by a small, dedicated team of detectives from West Mercia Police, assisted by the Regional Organised Crime Unit.

The prison system should be a safe environment for people to live and work in and a place of reform; this type of activity jeopardises the good order of the prisons and leads to difficult working environments for staff.

The defendants in this case are responsible for large scale supply of prohibited items into prisons which includes drugs, weapons, phones and tools which could be used to facilitate an escape or to conceal illicit items. The sentences reflect the serious nature of the offending by this group and should serve as a deterrent for anyone considering embarking on a similar venture.

The joint HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) and West Mercia police investigation started in July 2015, when police officers saw a package being thrown from a car towards a gate at the back of HMP Hewell in Worcestershire.

Over the next 16 months, prison and police officers intercepted 15 drone drops linked to the gang from prisons across the West Midlands, including HMP Hewell, HMP Featherstone in Wolverhampton, HMP Birmingham and HMP Stoke Heath in Market Drayton.

Some of the drones seized were analysed by Operation Trenton – the team of investigators that was by the Ministry of Justice earlier this year in

response to the growing threat to prison security posed by drones. The intelligence gleaned was then passed to police.

It emerged during the course of the investigation that Craig Hickinbottom was the ringleader behind the criminal enterprise, using mobile phones to direct operations from his prison cell. Mervyn Foster was his key contact on the outside, involving himself in all of the individual drone flights.

Meanwhile, evidence revealed that Hickinbottom's partner, Lisa Hodgetts, managed the money on behalf of the gang and ensured everyone was paid. She has accepted that she laundered in the region of £125,000 for the gang.

Police discovered at one point that she paid Foster by giving him a static caravan and plot in North Wales and had told her local authority that she wanted to buy her £72,000 council-owned property outright, despite earning a modest income as a beautician.

As police built their case against the group, covert camera footage from the perimeter of one prison helped to identify a number of the gang members operating drones outside and analysis of mobile phone data helped to provide evidence of a link between those on the outside and offenders in prison.

Hickinbottom admitted four counts of conspiring to bring contraband into prison, and conspiracy to supply psychoactive substances.

Foster, who was described as the conspiracy's "prime organiser on the outside", worked with John Quinn, who admitted three counts of conspiracy and another of conspiring to supply psychoactive substances.

Foster had others assist with packaging and transport: Terry Leach, Ashley Rollinson, Yvonne Hay, 41, and her boyfriend Francis Ward. Foster obtained some of the drugs he sent in from Artaf Hussain, who pleaded guilty to being concerned with the supply of cocaine.

On the inside, Hickinbottom was assisted with distribution in jail by cousin and co-conspirator John Hickinbottom. His cellmate Sanjay Patel used one of the illegal mobile phones which had been flown in – an offence he admitted.

The total drugs seized from those drones had a potential prison value of £370,000. There were a further 34 flights to prisons across the United Kingdom, including flights to HMP Perth in Scotland and HMP Doncaster.

The contents of the packages from those drones are unknown. Based on the value of the items seized, police estimated that the prison value of items from the remaining flights would be in the region £1.2million.

Background on counter-drone work

- Last year, a team of investigators – known as Operation Trenton – was formed in response to the growing threat to prison security posed by drones, which have been used as a method of smuggling drugs and mobile phones into establishments.
- Working alongside national law enforcement agencies and HM Prison and

Probation Service (HMPPS), the 40-strong team inspects drones that have been recovered from prisons in a bid to identify and track down those involved in smuggling contraband.

- The efforts are helping to effectively tackle the use of drones technology. So far, 17 people have been convicted for using drones to get contraband into prisons. They are serving sentences of more than 50 years in prison as a result of their illegal actions.
- The specialist team of officers contain staff from the police and HMPPS. They bring together intelligence from across prisons and the police to identify lines of inquiry, which will then be passed to local forces and organised crime officers.
- The Government is taking unprecedented action to tackle the supply and use of drugs, including an innovative drug testing programme, the training of over 300 specialist drug dogs, and upgrades to CCTV cameras across the estate.
- We have also invested heavily in modern technology, including the roll-out of body worn cameras and £2m on handheld and portable mobile phone detectors to help clamp down on drug-dealing behind bars.
- A £3million intelligence hub has also been established to tackle organised gang activity behind bars.
- We are also investing over £14million annually to build the HM Prisons and Probation Service Serious Organised Crime Unit and enhance our intelligence and search capability, allowing us to better gather, interrogate and use intelligence to disrupt criminal activity at national, regional and prison level.