# Environment Agency exposes surge in waste crime hotspots across England in 2023



The Environment Agency has recently unveiled alarming statistics and generated heatmaps that explicitly outline the geographical distribution of waste crime incidents across England. In 2023 alone, almost 17,000 suspected cases were reported, with the West Midlands, Yorkshire, and East Anglia emerging as the regions most affected. Specifically, the West Midlands recorded 2,008 reports, followed by Yorkshire with 1,791, and East Anglia with 1,678 incidents. This data underscores the urgent need for effective strategies to combat what is a burgeoning crisis in waste management.

The regulator's findings suggest that the illegal waste trade costs the UK economy approximately £1 billion annually. This staggering figure encompasses not only evaded taxes and the environmental damage caused by improper disposal practices but also substantial losses to legitimate businesses that operate within the framework of the law. Additional insights from the Environment Agency's National Waste Crime Survey indicate that only 25% of waste crime incidents are actually reported, hinting at a far greater undercurrent of illegal activities than the headline figures suggest.

In tandem with the heatmap release, there has been a notable increase in prosecutions targeting offenders in the highest-crime regions. For instance, G R Shorthouse Ltd, operating in the West Midlands, was recently fined nearly £110,000 for the unlawful storage and disposal of waste. In Yorkshire, significant legal actions have led to sentences, including a year-long imprisonment for Stuart Bedford, who was found running unlicensed waste operations. Interestingly, the Environment Agency’s enforcement manager, Emma Viner, emphasised the broader implications of waste crime, stating that it not only damages the environment but also undermines legitimate enterprises and public services.

In its ongoing efforts to tackle this issue, the government is ushering in new legislative measures aimed at curbing waste crime. Under the proposed Plan for Change, individuals caught dealing with illegal waste could face prison sentences of up to five years. In addition, local councils are set to gain enhanced powers to confiscate and destroy vehicles involved in such crimes. Circular Economy Minister Mary Creagh voiced her commitment to this initiative, declaring that the government is determined to disrupt the operations of rogue waste operators, whom she referred to as "waste cowboys."

Despite the government's intentions, the scale of waste crime continues to escalate. Recent statistics reveal a 6% increase in fly-tipping incidents during the 2023/24 financial year, with local authorities incurring costs exceeding £13 million for the clearance of large-scale dumping. David Gudgeon from Reconomy Connect remarked on the necessity of targeting crime hotspots and refining the Digital Waste Tracking system, which is scheduled for rollout in 2026, to further limit opportunities for criminals.

The issue of waste crime highlights not just a regulatory and enforcement challenge but a collective societal responsibility. Jacob Hayler, Executive Director of the Environmental Services Association, emphasised the role of citizens in this regard. He noted that each individual has a duty not only to manage their waste responsibly but also to report any suspected illegal activities. This community involvement is crucial in allowing regulatory bodies to take action against those who flout the law, ensuring better protection for both the environment and the integrity of waste management services.

As the government aims to tighten regulations and increase enforcement capabilities, it remains evident that addressing the rampant issue of waste crime will require a multifaceted approach involving collaboration among different authorities, improved community reporting mechanisms, and a commitment from individuals to aid in the fight against environmental and economic harm.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://resource.co/article/ea-publishes-heatmap-waste-crime-hotspots), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-suggests-almost-a-fifth-of-all-waste-is-illegally-managed), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-waste-crime-survey-2023/national-waste-crime-survey-2023-summary)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://resource.co/article/ea-publishes-heatmap-waste-crime-hotspots), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-suggests-almost-a-fifth-of-all-waste-is-illegally-managed), [[5]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-09-05/debates/BE7EEC87-3806-4F78-AE02-12B9891D9301/WasteCrimeStaffordshire)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-waste-crime-survey-2023/national-waste-crime-survey-2023-summary), [[4]](https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2025/05/07/working-together-to-stop-waste-criminals/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://resource.co/article/ea-publishes-heatmap-waste-crime-hotspots), [[6]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-10-20/debates/96F6B7E8-2D0A-4FC7-BE32-E47FF624918F/WasteCrime)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0116/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2025/05/07/working-together-to-stop-waste-criminals/), [[7]](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0116/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-waste-crime-survey-2023/national-waste-crime-survey-2023-summary), [[5]](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-09-05/debates/BE7EEC87-3806-4F78-AE02-12B9891D9301/WasteCrimeStaffordshire)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://resource.co/article/ea-publishes-heatmap-waste-crime-hotspots> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-suggests-almost-a-fifth-of-all-waste-is-illegally-managed> - In July 2023, the Environment Agency released findings from its National Waste Crime Survey, indicating that approximately 18% of all waste in England is illegally managed, equating to about 34 million tonnes annually. This illegal activity costs the English economy an estimated £1 billion each year, encompassing evaded taxes, environmental damage, and lost legitimate business. The survey also highlighted that only 25% of waste crime incidents are reported, suggesting a significant underreporting of such activities.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-waste-crime-survey-2023/national-waste-crime-survey-2023-summary> - The 2023 National Waste Crime Survey, conducted by the Environment Agency, revealed that 18% of all waste in England is perceived to be illegally managed. The survey also found that only 24% of waste crime incidents are reported to the Environment Agency, indicating a substantial underreporting of such activities. Respondents believed that financial penalties were the most effective deterrent against waste crime.
4. <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2025/05/07/working-together-to-stop-waste-criminals/> - The Environment Agency's blog post from May 2025 discusses the collaborative efforts to combat waste crime, highlighting that such activities cost the English economy an estimated £1 billion annually. The post emphasizes the importance of joint operations and intelligence sharing among various agencies to effectively tackle waste criminals and protect the environment.
5. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-09-05/debates/BE7EEC87-3806-4F78-AE02-12B9891D9301/WasteCrimeStaffordshire> - In a parliamentary debate on September 5, 2024, it was highlighted that waste crime costs the UK economy £1 billion annually, with 18% of waste potentially being handled illegally. The debate also noted that only 25% of waste crime incidents are reported, underscoring the need for improved reporting mechanisms and enforcement to address this issue effectively.
6. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-10-20/debates/96F6B7E8-2D0A-4FC7-BE32-E47FF624918F/WasteCrime> - A parliamentary debate on October 20, 2022, addressed the widespread issue of waste crime in England, noting that it costs the economy over £1 billion annually. The debate emphasized the need for enhanced regulation and increased enforcement powers to tackle this problem effectively, highlighting the significant impact of waste crime on communities and the environment.
7. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0116/> - A House of Commons Library research briefing from April 2024 discussed the scale and impact of waste crime in England, noting that approximately 18% of all waste is illegally managed, equating to about 34 million tonnes annually. The briefing highlighted the significant economic and environmental costs associated with waste crime and the challenges in addressing this issue.