

Operation Cleansweep

Birmingham City Council

Operation Cleansweep is a programme initiated by Birmingham City Council to combat the £11m per annum problem of fly-tipping, using enforcement action to tackle unregistered waste carriers. The problem of this illegal activity is increasing and each year 34,000 tonnes of dumped waste is collected in the city of Birmingham. In 2004, Birmingham's residents made 12,000 complaints concerning fly-tipping.

Birmingham City Council, the Environment Agency, Keep Britain Tidy (formerly ENCAMS) and West Midlands Police shared a determination to tackle both the causes and the effect of this environmental crime. Recognising this joint interest, the four organisations agreed a collaborative programme of work in 2003/04.

The partnership aimed both to encourage the public to be vigilant and report fly-tipping, and to increase public awareness of the correct waste disposal methods. The partnership also involved increasing enforcement and prosecution of fly-tipping, sharing knowledge and using joint protocols.

The four organisations pooled resources to:

- Achieve 12 joint waste enforcement exercises to identify illegal transport of waste and collect evidence of environmental crime;
- Support Keep Britain Tidy's national fly-tipping campaign in May 2003;
- Increase camera surveillance at fly-tipping hotspots;
- Advertise in the local press and Yellow Pages warning about rogue waste collection;
- Encourage businesses to find opportunities to turn waste into an economic benefit;
- Share information about problem sites and fly-tipping activity;
- Develop a joint programme for raising awareness using the media;
- Target rogue traders using a poster campaign and increase roadside stopchecks;
- Use the complementary powers of these partner agencies to make organised fly-tipping more difficult;
- Identify legislative problems and look for routes to bring about change;

- Identify and learn from successful initiatives that tackle fly-tipping and implement best practice in Birmingham;
- Seek to identify areas of funding and whenever possible make joint bids;
- Identify ways in which partners can assist in tackling fly-tipping in Birmingham;
- Produce progress and evaluation reports to Birmingham's Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership and other interested parties.

Operation Cleansweep tackled fly-tipping by targeting unregistered commercial waste carriers. In addition to this, the four organisations worked with Trading Standards and HM Revenue and Customs to tackle associated vehicle offences. Officers from Birmingham City Council's regulatory services (Public Health and Trading Standards), the police, HM Revenue and Customs and the Environment Agency, were involved in stopping waste carriers to check if they were registered and to check for other vehicle-related offences at sites across the city. Keep Britain Tidy was also involved in the initial publicity campaign.

Cleansweep attracted national praise from the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), Local Government Association (LGA) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The Environment Minister Alun Michael, who was very impressed with the scheme, visited one of the exercises. Similar schemes are now taking place throughout the country. In addition to this media coverage has been extensive.

The results have been very impressive with a reduction in the number of unregistered waste carriers stopped during exercises, from 41% in the initial Cleansweep exercise in April 2003 to 11% in the latest exercise. Due to its success, eight further Cleansweep exercises have been planned for 2005/06. The cost of these sweeps has been minimal. Police were employed on overtime rates. Each exercise involved approximately six staff from the council's regulatory services, four from HM Revenue and Customs, six from the Environment Agency and six from the police.

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