Police-style powers handed to environment officers as part of plans to bring down waste criminals

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New powers will allow officers to intervene earlier and bring more criminals to justice

Waste criminals could soon face police-style powers as the government steps up its crackdown on the crime.

Under a new zero-tolerance approach, the government is looking to expand powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) as well as the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) and other legislation to the Environment Agency and its enforcement officers.

This would allow officers to intervene earlier, bring more criminals to justice and hit the organised gangs behind illegal waste where it hurts by disrupting their finances.

The move would make the Environment Agency one of a few organisations with these powers – a clear signal that waste crime is being treated as a serious organised crime.

The announcement comes as the government prepares to publish its new ‘Waste Crime Action Plan’, which will set out a tough approach to these costly crimes - from fly-tipping to large illegal waste sites.

As waste sites emerge across the country, the new measures will help restore pride in our neighbourhoods, boost community spirit and support the government’s wider Pride in Place programme.

The government is also exploring how enforcement bodies can share information with banks and finance companies to inform them of waste criminality, so they can make informed decisions on whether to keep doing business with the waste criminals.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

“Waste crime is a disgrace. It blights our countryside and communities, damaging our environment and economy.

“That is why we are taking decisive action. We’re giving the Environment Agency the police-like powers they need to stop waste criminals in their tracks and bring those responsible swiftly to justice.”

Chief Executive of the Environment Agency Philip Duffy said:

“Waste crime causes misery across communities, and we have significantly stepped up our response to it already. But we are not standing still.

“While having more boots on the ground is important in tackling these criminal networks, we also need to make sure our officers have as many powers as possible to bring them down.

“But we can’t do this on our own. We are working closely with the police and local government. And we need the eyes and ears of the public to report potential dumping through Crimestoppers or our incident hotline. Working together, we can drive criminals out of our waste sector.”

Crime and Policing Minister Sarah Jones said:

“Fly tipping is an attack on our countryside, our communities, and the environment we all share.

“We will give the Environment Agency the power they need to crack down on these reckless criminals.”

Any laws would be introduced when parliamentary time allows, but this shows which side the Government is on: hardworking, law-abiding people who expect their streets to be clean.

The Joint Unit for Waste Crime (JUWC), which brings together multiple organisations including police forces and the National Crime Agency, has expanded to 20 specialists. This includes former police officers, intelligence analysts and financial investigators.

From July 2024 to the end of 2025, the Environment Agency secured 122 prosecutions, leading to 10 immediate custodial sentences, and shut down 1,205 illegal waste sites.

Under new legislation, waste criminals caught transporting and dealing with waste illegally will face up to five years in prison.

Waste crime costs the economy £1 billion every year, with the criminal networks behind this criminality becoming increasingly sophisticated and causing serious harm to communities and the environment.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/police-style-powers-handed-to-environment-officers-as-part-of-plans-to-bring-down-waste-criminals