

Cornish businessmen to pay £240k for illegal waste disposal

Two businessmen will pay more than £240,000 after being convicted for operating an illegal waste disposal operation where raw sewage was “injected” into the Cornish countryside.

Company director Neal Tremayne used his firm, Carnon Valley Transport, to collect septic tank contents and other controlled wastes from holiday and caravan parks, hotels, a farm, abattoir and a car dealership. He then put that waste into giant storage tankers belonging to Brian Matthews.

Mr Matthews was paid a quarter of the going rate for legitimate disposal and he did this by injecting the mixture into the ground at farmland he rented in Kehelland, Crosslanes, Sparnock and Mithian in West Cornwall.

Both men pleaded guilty to various environmental offences.

For negligent culpability and environmental harm, Mr Matthews, of Twelvehead, Truro was ordered to pay £136,674.50 under the Proceeds of Crime Act within three months or face imprisonment, fined £8,000 plus £10,000 in costs at Truro Crown Court last week (April 14).

Judge Carr called Matthews’ operation “woefully lax and inadequate”, adding: “It was effectively an open door policy for waste to be deposited. No staff on site, no inspections, no checking of the chits.

“It was no surprise that Brian Matthews was able to charge significantly less for disposal and run a profitable business, making £1.3m between 2013 and 2019.”

Mr Tremayne of Penryn, Cornwall, was ordered to pay £80,000

under the Proceeds of Crime Act within three months or face imprisonment, given a four-month prison sentence suspended for 12 months, alongside fines for him and his firm totalling £3,000 plus £3,450 in costs.

During an interview, Mr Tremayne claimed he was keeping costs down for customers by paying Mr Matthews £27 to dispose of a 4,500-litre tanker load of liquid waste – considerably less than the going rate of £60-£100 for proper disposal.

Mr Matthews also admitted during interview that he could only accept septic tank waste, but anything could have been going into tanks at his sites.

During a two-year period investigated by the Environment Agency, Matthews accepted around 73 million litres of liquid waste – the equivalent of £432,000 income.

Mr Tremayne admitted failing to give waste transfer notes to customers which detail where waste has come from, its quantity, contents and destination.

It was found Mr Matthews did not have the proper measures in place to check that only septic tank waste was going into his tanks, or environmental permits needed to screen and test the waste prior to storage for spreading.

Waste transfer notes were produced by Mr Tremayne for one client, an upmarket car retailer. The note claimed car wash effluent was being taken to South West Water for disposal, but it was actually given to Mr Matthews for injection into the ground.

Injecting and spreading suitable wastes to agricultural land is a farming practice used to improve field nutrient levels using manure and slurry.

Sludge from sewage plants and residual septic tank sludge can also be used, with care. Raw sewage can carry potentially

toxic elements – viruses, bacteria and pathogens like salmonella.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said: "When done properly and with care, sludge from sewage plants and septic tanks can provide suitable crop nutrient.

"However, if abused as a cheap and nasty form of disposal to undercut the competitive marketplace, then it is not just legitimate businesses that suffer but also the environment.

"There are regulations in place to prevent toxic chemicals like these from polluting the environment and endangering human health. Ignorance of the rules is not a defence."

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