

Fly issues affecting Westbury

Background

On 9 July 2013, Public Protection began receiving complaints of an excessive number of flies in Westbury, initially from the Brook Lane area. Initial concerns centred on the new Mechanical Biological treatment (MBT) Plant operated by Hills Waste Solutions (HWS) at the Northacre Resource Recovery Centre (NRRC), which is currently undergoing commissioning. This coincided with a prolonged period of hot weather.

Following initial investigations, Hills concluded that the levels of flies at the NRRC was greater than would be anticipated at this type of facility, though in fact the problem peaked during a period where the plant was not accepting new waste. Since February this year Wiltshire Council has been delivering varying quantities of waste during the commissioning phase in order to allow the required building and equipment tests to be completed. Waste deliveries were suspended on a planned basis on 8 July to allow for additional equipment to be fitted within the plant.

Wiltshire Council has an interest through its Waste Management role as the plant has been developed by HWS to receive 60,000 tonnes of Wiltshire's residual waste per annum. After screening and treatment, followed by separation of metals, it produces a fuel. The NRRC is regulated by the Environment Agency under a Permit. Combined with other Energy from Waste projects and increased recycling, the plant will help divert over 110,000 tonnes of domestic waste from landfill every year.

Some fifty complaints were received by Wiltshire Council and just over one hundred by the Environment Agency over a period of three weeks up to the end of July. The peak of the problem seemed to be over a 10 day period from 15 July to 25 July after which reports of numbers of flies began to drop back towards what may be considered as normal background levels for the summer period.

Investigations

Public Protection, Waste Management, Media and Public Health for the Authority, together with the Environment Agency and Hills Waste Solutions co-operated in sharing information from early in the investigation. In particular:

- Details of numbers of complaints, their distribution and the days on which they were received were passed between the organisations. The details were anonymised to comply with data protection.
- The Environment Agency and Public Protection shared responsibility for searching for other possible sources.
- Public Protection visited a representative number of premises to check the extent of the problem and the species of fly involved.
- Hills Waste shared with all partners the details of the enhanced fly control measures introduced to combat the problem. The Company was pro-active in writing to dwellings in the affected area, including providing fly-papers and in providing

information to the media. They also promoted a separate “Enquiry Line” to provide a facility whereby householders and local businesses could call HWS to notify them of issues with flies at their property / premises

- Information available on the Council’s website was reviewed and enhanced, and the information agreed with partners. Additional scripting was developed for the council’s Customer Services Unit to ensure that appropriate advice could be provided over the phone.
- Hills Waste, in consultation with all partners, decided not to take in any new waste until satisfied that the problems at the plant were resolved. Deliveries recommenced on Tuesday 6 August, though still on a commissioning basis.

During the period of concern, Hills Waste held two extraordinary Liaison Committee meetings involving the enforcing agencies, local politicians, Waste Management and a local business. In addition to regular telephone and face to face discussions, two teleconferences took place between the Environment Agency and the Authority. The Waste Management Group were in daily contact with HWS to discuss the progress of enhancements to existing fly management controls, and the implementation of new fly control measures. Combined with regular discussions with the EA, this informed the joint decisions regarding the timing that waste deliveries recommenced.

Cause of the Problems

It is considered that a combination of issues led to the problems experienced during this period including:

- The extended period of unusually hot weather naturally increased the fly population generally.
- Although no other significant sources were discovered it cannot be assumed that the sole cause of the problem rested with the NRRC plant.
- The stop/start nature of commissioning the plant meant that adequate temperatures within the treatment hall may not have been reached to control fly generation.
- Some of the controls at the plant did not work as planned and had to be enhanced.

Current situation

- Wiltshire Council began delivering 240t of residual waste to the plant per day on Tuesday 6 August. It is anticipated that this will remain unchanged as the final stages of commissioning tests are near to completion and the plant will become fully operational.
- HWS have developed and are continuing to improve a Fly Management Plan for the site to be enacted at times of prolonged hot weather or when they observe an increase in flies at the site through new on-site monitoring procedures.
- Existing control measures have been reviewed and upgraded following the fly incident.
- The EA have confirmed that the level of flies at the NRRC facility is at acceptable levels that would be expected at a facility of this nature.
- Public complaints have continued to decline in number, but continue to be closely monitored.

