

EVIDENCE FROM OUR WASTE CRIME AND CRIME PREVENTION RESEARCH

Submitted on 30 May 2022 to the Inquiry into Government Actions to Combat Waste Crime

DEFRA data on fly-tipping is limited. The data are aggregated quarterly which means seasonal effects confuse interpretation of trends, while analysis of events – whether national (such as lockdown), regional or local - is impossible. The absence of location information means identification of hotspots is not possible. Waste crime on private land is overlooked. Overall, it lacks granular details that could inform problem-solving efforts to combat waste crime.

To partially overcome these problems, we surveyed all local authorities in England and Wales using freedom of information requests and received 216 useable responses. The method is detailed in a study preprint prepared as part of our UKRI-funded research into the crime harms of the pandemic.¹ Early in the pandemic, news media were awash with claims of huge increases in fly-tipping. However, we found that, contrary to expectation, fly-tipping *declined* significantly (around 20 percent) during the first national lockdown. As lockdown restrictions were removed there was a fly-tipping resurgence which balanced out the earlier gains, with a net effect close to zero.

While this demonstrates the importance of evidence-based waste crime research, perhaps more important for the inquiry it how it clarifies that detailed fly-tipping data are routinely collected by local authorities but significantly under-utilised. We recommend:

- Collation and analysis of existing local data at the national level, to provide an evidence-based platform for identifying *additional* data collection needs: other sources, surveys, observational fieldwork, cross-reference to police and housing services data, standardisation of practice, and so on. Much of this work can be undertaken at little or no extra cost.
- Rigorous problem-solving crime analysis² of this existing information to enhance knowledge about the extent and nature of waste crime and its prevention. For example, the activities of organised crime might be inferred by distinguishing larger fly-tips, potentially to identify the extent, nature, distribution and modus operandi of organised waste crime.

¹ Dixon, Farrell and Tilley. 2022. Illegal waste fly-tipping in the COVID-19 pandemic: Enhanced compliance, temporal displacement and urban-rural variation, preprint at <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/df5ue/>

² Clarke & Eck. 2005. Crime Analysis for Problem-Solvers. US Dept. of Justice at <https://www.popcenter.org/sites/default/files/library/reading/PDFs/60steps-2.pdf>



- In the longer-term, a more comprehensive data collection system should be linked to routine waste crime analysis that is informed by previous research on preventing fly-tipping³ plus the significant crime prevention knowledge base.

With respect to the crime prevention knowledge base, we summarise three key aspects for the purposes of the waste crime inquiry: (1) Evidence-based problem-solving crime analysis can inform successful prevention efforts, including against organised crime.⁴ Crime scripts, for instance, can identify intervention pinch-points.⁵ (2) Contrary to popular belief, prevented crime often does not displace (move elsewhere) or does so only partially, meaning prevention has a lasting impact, including on professional and organised crime.⁶ (3) Not only can prevention be effective, but research shows its impact often extends beyond the intended scope, known as a diffusion of preventive benefits.

In short, waste crime interventions are hampered by a lack of detailed understanding of the problem. We recommend collating and exploiting the granular information that is currently collected locally and, in the longer term, extending systematic data collection and waste crime analysis, building on the strong existing platform of crime prevention research. We are happy to expand on the details and our recommendations on request. With best wishes for the success of the inquiry,

Yours sincerely,

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³ e.g. Webb et al. (2006). *Fly-tipping: Causes, Incentives and Solutions* at: <https://bit.ly/3EU6eu6> ; Brown and Evans (2012). When intervention is a load of rubbish: Evaluating clean-up operations, *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 14(1); 33-47.

⁴ Bullock et al. 2012. *Situational Prevention of Organised Crimes*. Taylor and Francis.

⁵ Hancock and Laycock (2012). Organised crime scripts: Prospects for disruption, in Bullock et al. *Situational Prevention of Organised Crimes*.

⁶ Guerette, R. T. 2009. [Analysing Crime Displacement and Diffusion](#). COPS Problem-Solving Tools Series No. 10. US Department of Justice: Washington DC.

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