



PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT BOARD 3 September 2019

BBC War On Waste - Recycling Sacks Malaysia

Paul Partridge, Head of Operations
Samir Pandya, Operations Strategy & Policy Manager

BACKGROUND

- In 2012, the Council appointed Viridor Waste Management to reprocess the mixed dry recycling it collects.
- The contract was for a 5-yr term (2012-2017), with an option to extend to 2022.
- The contract was extended for 3 yrs to 31 March 2020, but terminated by mutual agreement on 16 May 2019 to enable BDC to partner with Suffolk County Council.
- Both the old and new contract specification included a requirement for tenderers to provide a clear and robust audit trail to demonstrate that the waste was reprocessed in full compliance with legal requirements, both in the UK and abroad.

VIRIDOR'S CREDENTIALS

- One of the leading UK waste management companies providing services to over 150 local authorities and corporate clients as well as more than 32,000 customers across the UK.
- Operates to international accreditations and ISO systems and standards for environmental quality and health and safety management.
- Is regulated by the Environment Agency (EA) and only works with EA accredited and licensed facilities.
- Has a stringent compliance process for all trade and insists on receiving copies of Government issued licences and permits before any sale or shipment is made.

WHAT PROMPTED THE MEDIA INTEREST?

- In December 2018, BDC was contacted by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Keo Films who were making a programme called ***War on Plastics*** to be aired on BBC1 in June 2019.
- As part of his research, Hugh had found a single BDC recycling sack at an unlicensed waste site in Malaysia and invited us to comment.
- It came to light that this site (and others) visited in Malaysia by Hugh contained recycling sacks from other UK authorities, along with empty packaging for products designed for the UK market.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

- The sack (which was empty) was at least 4 years' old.
- Viridor confirmed they exported plastic film and sacks to Malaysia in May 2018, but *nothing* prior to that.
- The material was sold as an '*end-of-waste product*' for reprocessing (into pellets/flake) for re-use in manufacturing, with no further reprocessing.
- Viridor received certification that the consignment had been reprocessed as intended and concluded there had not been any breakdown in their supply chain.
- We were unable to establish when or how the sack came to be at this site, but should any additional information come to light, we will investigate further.

HOW DID WE RESPOND?

- We asked Viridor to investigate and requested more information from Keo Films, which they did not provide.
- As part of our own investigations, we contacted other councils whose sacks had been found at the site.
- BDC and Viridor issued a joint statement for the Mail on Sunday and responded to various press enquiries.
- A note was sent to all Members and to our MPs.
- We responded to enquiries from the public and posted information on our Facebook page and on social media.
- We flagged the issue to the Comms Team at Defra.
- BBC Essex aired an interview with Cllr. Wendy Schmitt.
- We published a comprehensive Q&A on our website.

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVES?

- We all care about the global environment and welcome the key messages that came out of the programme.
- Comments on social media suggest that local residents are thinking more carefully about the impact of their own waste on the environment.
- Helps support BDC's campaign on waste minimisation.
- Reinforced the need for better infrastructure in the UK to reprocess plastic waste.
- Coincided with the Government's consultation on the Resources and Waste Strategy, helping to reinforce the importance of this issue at both local and national level.
- Viridor has a new contract with a supplier that will see the majority of plastic sacks and film it reprocesses (5,000t) retained in the UK.



Any Questions?