

**29<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

**Information for Veolia in relation to the WTS fire on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2019.**

**Executive Summary**

This report sets out the Council's response to the fire at the Waste Transfer Station (WTS) on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

The report details the method for collecting litter from bins along the seafront and also how hot loads are dealt with. These processes are covered in staff inductions and they are well known by all staff.

Hot loads are difficult to detect from litter bins and can derive from a range of sources such as BBQs, batteries, cigarettes, fireworks etc. In relation to the collection on 25<sup>th</sup> August there was no indication at the time of a hot load either during collection, transit or tipping.

Whilst it is possible to minimise the risk of a hot load in litter bins, it is not possible to eradicate the risk entirely. Cityclean will review the existing process for the collection of hot loads to identify further opportunities for improvement to minimise the risk of hot loads

**1.0 Background**

1.1. A fire broke out in the Waste Transfer Station (WTS) on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2019. The fire was contained however significant damage was sustained and the facility was closed for a period of time whilst repairs undertaken. East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service who attended the fire believe that the cause of the fire was most likely a hot load deposited at the waste transfer station.

1.2 Veolia believe that a Streets Collections vehicle is the likely vehicle that contained a hot load. Although there were other loads in the bay from tips throughout the afternoon and evening, by matching the precise location of this tip at 2120 with the later footage showing where the fire appeared to start, make this load more probable and any other load unlikely.

**2.0 Enquiry into the handling of waste from seafront litter bins**

2.1 The driver of the vehicle and the Acting Operations Manager for Streets were interviewed.

2.2 The Driver confirmed that he tipped on 25<sup>th</sup> August around 21:20. He covered the beach for the whole of his shift and collected all general waste from litter bins from this area, but primarily Madeira Drive, Lower Prom (Kings Road Arches), Hove Promenade and Kings Esplanade. We are clear that this was a regular litter collection and not a collection from the dedicated metal BBQ bins located in areas where BBQs are allowed (see section 6 for further information on how these bins are managed).

2.3 The process for collecting waste from litter bins is to open the bin, pull out the container, pick up the sack from out of the bin, replace the new sack in the container and return to the bin. The full sack is then deposited into the back of the caged van.

2.4 The Driver stated that Street Cleansing Drivers also collect sacks that have already been removed from the bins. These are collected from known informal collections points. It is not feasible to open each sack individually to physically check the contents due to volume of waste collected at seafront locations during summer months and health and safety issues relating to sharps.

2.5 It is difficult to detect hot loads in a litter bin. Whilst it is possible to detect if there is heat coming from the bag or the shape of the bag indicates a hot load such as a BBQ, it is difficult to reliably identify these items when hidden in bins that are full of general waste.

2.6 The Charge-hand for the Seafront was also asked about the process for identifying hot loads such as BBQs as detailed in 3.1. The process is covered in staff inductions.

### **3.0 Findings**

3.1 Heat sources are difficult to detect in litter bins. For example, the indication of a hot load will be from heat or smoke. The indication of a BBQ or other hot load will be from heat or the square shape if there isn't rubbish surrounding the object obscuring the shape. It is only if BBQs are detected by staff, that they are checked for heat by:

- Visually looking for signs of heat/smoke
- Waving a hand above the BBQ to feel for heat
- Feeling the bottom of the BBQ with gloves on
- Feeling the bottom of the BBQ with gloves off
- Look at the ash. If silver then it is likely to still be hot, even if there is no heat, and the Operative will leave the BBQ,

3.2 If an item like a BBQ is found and heat is suspected, the crew will always leave behind the item or bag to cool off and be picked up by a subsequent collection. If the BBQ is cold then it is disposed of in the normal rubbish. This method is effective if the BBQ is identified in the rubbish. However sacks of rubbish are also collected that have been piled up in a collection point. It is very difficult to detect BBQs from piled up rubbish sacks because of the speed in which these are collected.

3.3 Hot loads are difficult to detect from litter bins and can derive from a range of other sources such as batteries, cigarettes, fireworks etc.

3.4 In relation to the collection on 25<sup>th</sup> August there was no indication of a hot load either during collection, transit or tipping

3.5 The process for identifying heat sources is covered in the staff induction.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

4.1 East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service reported that the fire was started by a hot load.

4.2 There is no evidence that the driver on the night in question was carrying out his duties in a way that diverged from what is normal Cityclean practice. The risk of

BBQs and other fire risk items is well understood by the driver and supervisor and checks are undertaken where it is practical to do so.

4.2 It is concluded that in a regular street bin it would be very difficult to identify an ember with low temperature output and no obvious visual indicator. The situation becomes even more challenging when applied to domestic waste collections and the hot load is contained within other waste.

4.3 Whilst it is possible to minimise the risk of hot load in litter bins, it is not possible to eradicate the risk entirely. Better training and communication with the public will help support the appropriate disposal of hot loads.

## 5.0 Recommendations

5.1 In terms of continuous improvement in the collection of litter from the seafront Cityclean will work to review the existing process for the collection of hot loads to identify further opportunities for improvement to minimise the risk of hot loads. Brighton & Hove is particularly challenging during summer months, when the seafront area is busy late into the evening, with visitors and residents making use of the beach to eat and drink. This will be reviewed by the joint Fire Prevention & Control Project Group established with ESCC and Veolia (waste disposal PFI contract partners). The table below outlines the key tasks and timescales.

**Table 1**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Who responsible</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Research industry guidance	Project Officer, BHCC	February 2020
Research what other similar local authorities do	Waste Contract Officer	February 2020
Public engagement strategy	Communications Officer, BHCC	February 2020
Review current BBQ bin and hot loads provision	Streets Operations Manager, BHCC	February 2020
Equipment and cost implications	Streets Operations Manager, BHCC	Early March 2020
Draft hot loads procedure	Head of Operations and Waste Contract Officer	Early March 2020
Draft Risk Assessment & Method Statement	Streets Operations Manager, BHCC	March 2020
Staff induction/training procedure	Operations Manager, BHCC	March/April 2020
Monitoring arrangements for reviewing the procedure	Head of Operations	March 2020
Test findings with front line staff	Head of Operations and Waste Contract Office	March 2020

<b>Task</b>	<b>Who responsible</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Implement new procedure	Head of Operations	Mid-April 2020

## **6.0 Further information on BBQ Bins**

6.1 BBQs are banned in certain areas as marked out by signs along the seafront. BBQ bins are located in beach areas where the Council allow BBQs to take place. They are collected in the morning to minimise the risk that they are still hot. They are collected separately with no other rubbish. If there is heat from the bin the BBQ bin is left for another 24 hours. The BBQs are transferred individually from the bin to a large bin bag. This is then loaded onto a caged van.

6.2 Veolia queried the procedure for the collection of BBQ Bins (appendix 1). Cityclean undertook a trial to douse the load with water before disposing at the Waste Transfer Station. It was not effective because the BBQs are contained within a bag so the water runs off and does not penetrate to the contents. It should be noted that the on the night in question the cause of the fire was from a hot load within litter bins and not the specific BBQ bins.