

Letter of 23 July from Charlotte Leslie MP to Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, about the fly infestation at Avonmouth Docks.

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Avonmouth Flies

Over a period of about 6 week during May and June, I was literally bombarded with desperate concerns from constituents in Avonmouth, a village neighbouring Bristol Port, which was infested with swarms of flies. Flies entered local businesses, restaurants, pubs, cafes and people's homes where residents were forced to stand guard over their dining tables to prevent the animals landing on their food, and eat under a mosquito net in some cases.

The cause was bales of refuse waste managed by waste company Boomeco, which were sat waiting at the nearby Port to be shipped out to Scandinavia. However, these bails split open because of poor packaging, storage and transportation problems and the flies laid eggs. When the summer heat hit, they hatched, multiplied and colonised the village with all the associated public health issues associated with them. All this could have been so easily prevented.

Boomeco themselves informed the EA of the problem on the 7th May and by the 16th, the Agency had received over 20 reports from concerned members of the public. My constituents and I were told that the EA was working with the Council, that action was being taken and that the lifecycle of the fly meant that everything would be back to normal in a couple of days. This was emphatically not the case.

On one Friday when I myself had been in Avonmouth, witnessed the problem and heard the universally strong complaints and desperation from residents, the EA sent me an e-mail telling me their offices had been out in Avonmouth on that same day and residents were not worried. This was misleading at best.

The EA did revoke Boomeco's license to operate, hoping to prevent any further repeat of the incident. But this did not resolve the public health problem of the flies already in Avonmouth and residents endured week so of suffering. There was not emergency plan in place to deal with this public health hazard. There are other problems too within Avonmouth such as metallic dust in the air and issues of noise, where the EA has been incredibly slow to act.

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Charlotte Leslie MP

Defra response



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From Dan Rogerson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management

Thank you for your letter of 23 July to the Secretary of State about the way in which the Environment Agency carries out its responsibilities regarding waste crime and poor performance by waste site operators. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and am sorry for the delay in doing so.

I appreciate your concerns. I am aware that you are in direct contact with the Environment Agency and that you are meeting the Secretary of State to discuss these matters on 9 September. I am sure that will be a constructive and mutually useful meeting. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions or concerns you may have.

DAN ROGERSON MP



Briefing from the Environment Agency to Defra

Fly problems in Avonmouth, Bristol June 2014

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During May this year residents in Avonmouth reported heavy fly presence in their homes and properties. We received complaints from about sixty properties, starting around 7 May. Our investigations established that Boomeco was the source. There were unsatisfactory operating procedures causing the bale wrapping to be damaged, allowing flies to enter the waste and breed, giving rise to heavy infestations. These infestations were exacerbated by warm weather at that time. We told Boomeco to make urgent improvements on several occasions. Each time, the situation slightly improved briefly but, by 3 June 2014, we were still dissatisfied with their environmental controls and removed the company's Regulatory Position Statement. The outcome of this is that Boomeco are not permitted to temporarily store RDF bales at the port. This has brought their operation to a close for now. We have also begun formal investigations into Boomeco's activities relating to the RDF bales.

We have told Boomeco that if they wish to reinstate their operation at the port, we will only allow them to do so once they have applied for and been granted a full environmental permit.

On our most recent inspection of the Boomeco site, on 16 June 2014, we found the site to be clear of RDF bales, with no flies apparent. Photographs taken by Environment Agency officers at the site are shown in Appendix A.

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Public and other engagement

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Our Area Environment Manager met with Charlotte Leslie MP on 30 May and is due to meet again with her, along with some residents, the Bristol Port Company and Bristol City Council, on Friday 13 June.

Looking forward

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We will continue to provide briefings to the community, and will work closely with regulatory partners and with the Bristol Port Company to minimise nuisance and environmental impacts.

17 June 2014

Briefing from EA to Defra for the letter from Charlotte Leslie MP to Secretary of State

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We can confirm that the Boomeco site in Avonmouth is now clear. There is no Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF) stored on the docks and no RDF in 'live load' i.e. RDF bales are loaded direct to the ship with no interim storage. We have not received further complaints about flies after live loading commenced, but we are still receiving calls and emails about dust.

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