

Abandoned Vehicles Policy Paper



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Executive Summary

This paper sets out Keep Wales Tidy's position on the subject of abandoned vehicles in Wales. The organisation understands that whilst the prevalence of abandoned vehicles may not be especially severe, any occurrence negatively impacts on local environmental quality.

Keep Wales Tidy is encouraged by the apparent drop in abandoned vehicle arisings; however the organisation would like to see more consistency in their recording. As yet the organisation is concerned that a discrepancy in waste classification between local authorities gives an underestimate of the true number of abandoned vehicles across Wales.

Local authorities have a duty to remove abandoned vehicles from their land. Whilst there is a duty upon the local authority it is clear that local authorities have at their disposal many different options to deal with incidences of abandoned vehicles and associated issues. This allows for responses to be made that are appropriate to the locality; something that Keep Wales Tidy generally approves of.

Keep Wales Tidy is again encouraged that legislative changes have made the illegal disposal of vehicles more difficult than it has been historically. This paper calls for local authorities to provide a free service of vehicle collection in order to prevent vehicles being abandoned. It also calls for the Welsh Assembly Government's Towards Zero Waste document to outline specific targets relating to abandoned vehicles.

Introduction

Keep Wales Tidy believes that abandoned vehicles negatively impact on local environmental quality. Any waste which is simply abandoned in the public realm adds to an appearance of disrepair. It can further bring about a feeling that such behavior is acceptable, which risks others following suit and thereby further degrading neighbourhoods. As an organisation Keep Wales Tidy is concerned with the safety and general wellbeing of the public. The potential for abandoned vehicles to pose a risk to public health is therefore another reason why Keep Wales Tidy has looked at the subject.

This paper shows that the prevalence of abandoned vehicles appears to be falling and looks for possible explanations for the decline. The paper initially sets out to articulate what an abandoned vehicle is, including the role of constituent parts such as tyres. It then reviews recent trends such as the perceived impact of legislative changes and the various recognised methods of dealing with abandoned vehicles, as well as locally relevant case studies. The paper concludes with a concise summary of the situation and a series of recommendations.

What is an Abandoned Vehicle?

A vehicle is generally regarded as being abandoned if it has been left at a location for a prolonged period of time and if the owner no longer wants it. Whilst abandoned vehicles often have no valid tax disc, this should not be used as a precise indicator; not all abandoned cars are untaxed. Similarly cars may be taxed yet abandoned.

Abandoned vehicles differ from nuisance vehicles, which by nature are not abandoned. Such vehicles are often repaired in the street as part of a commercial business which creates blight, takes up residents' parking spaces and can damage the highway. Residents are also affected in similar ways by vehicles being left on the highway for sale as part of a commercial business.¹

Who's Responsibility are Abandoned Vehicles?

Under Section 3 of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978, local authorities have the statutory duty to remove abandoned vehicles. Each of Wales' 22 local authorities accepts reports from the public regarding abandoned vehicles. Under the Removal and Disposal of Vehicle Regulations 1986 and the subsequent amendments made in 2002, local authorities can issue a 24-hour notice on a vehicle that they believe to be of no value. If it has not been moved within 24 hours it can be removed and destroyed immediately. There is no statutory duty on a local authority to contact the owner, however, they may wish to do so in order to reclaim the costs of removal and destruction. If a vehicle is believed to have some value, it is issued with a seven-day notice, and attempts must be made to contact the owner. After seven days it can be

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/impact-assessment/pdf/clean-neighbourhoods-ria.pdf>

removed and destroyed, unless it has a valid excise license, in which case it must be held until 14 days after the expiry of the excise.

The police have no statutory duty for the removal of abandoned vehicles. However, under sections 99 to 101 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and under the Removal and Disposal of Vehicle Regulations 1986 they can authorise immediate removal if they deem the vehicle to be:

- In a condition or situation that is potentially dangerous.
- Causing an obstruction.
- Contravening a parking restriction.

In addition to the powers to remove vehicles, the owner can be prosecuted by the local authority under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 if they are found to be responsible for abandoning a vehicle.

If an abandoned vehicle is to be disposed of, it must be done so in accordance with the End of Life Vehicle Directive 2003. This sets strict environmental controls on treating abandoned vehicles, which are considered a hazardous waste. Broadly, in order to correctly dispose of a vehicle it must be issued with a Certificate of Destruction (CoD) and in turn the DVLA will de-register it. A CoD can only be issued at an Authorised Treatment Facility (ATF), a licensed facility able to accept waste vehicles. (The End of Life Vehicle Directive 2003 can be viewed in full at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20032635.htm?lang=e>)

As of November 2008, there were 96 registered ATFs in Wales. An up to date list of Welsh ATFs is downloadable from the Environment Agency's website: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/regulation/65470.aspx>. There are two service providers that oversee the network of ATFs across Wales and the broader UK. These are Car Take Back (www.cartakeback.com) and Autogreen (www.autogreen.org.uk), each of which only has responsibility for vehicles from certain manufacturers. Both providers are monitored by the Environment Agency.

Local authorities generally pay a fee for disposing of vehicles at ATFs. However there have been numerous initiatives whereby local authorities work with ATFs and the network service providers to concertedly dispose of abandoned vehicles at discounted costs to the local authority or even free of charge. Such initiatives tend to necessitate there being a particular supply of abandoned vehicles in order to be worthwhile for all parties involved.

Unwanted vehicles

An unwanted vehicle in a state of disrepair may be a visual blight on a neighbourhood. Additionally an unwanted vehicle may go on to become an abandoned vehicle. All local authorities offer a service of unwanted vehicle collection and many local authorities currently offer this as a free or discounted service. Other local authorities may employ temporary initiatives such as vehicle 'amnesties' or charge a standard fee.

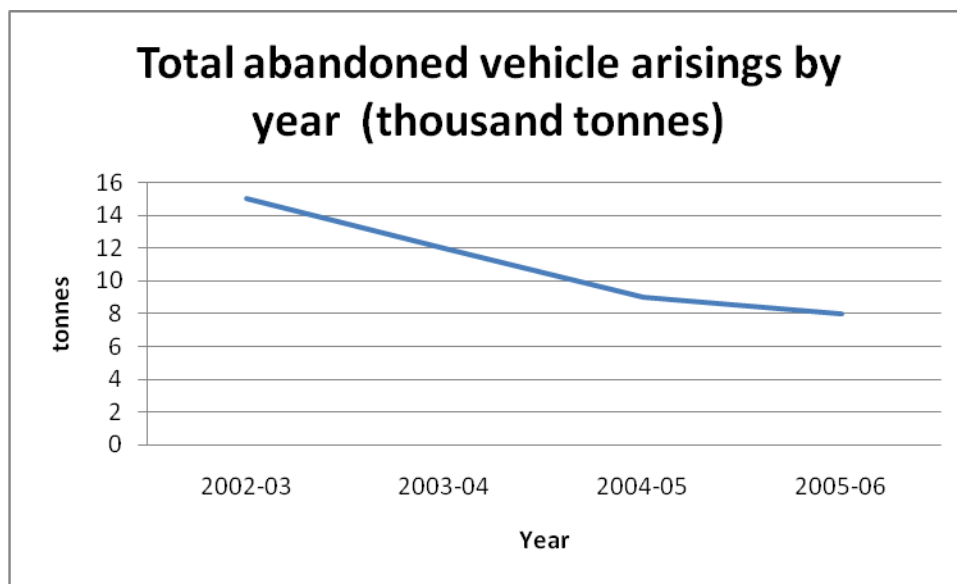
Car owners can dispose of their unwanted cars legally, safely and without charge, and they can obtain a Certificate of Destruction to prove the vehicle is no longer their responsibility. This is possible and indeed an obligation under the End of Life Vehicle Directive 2003. As of January 1st 2007 vehicle manufacturers pay for all or a significant part of the costs of free take-back of

no or negative value vehicles to a treatment facility. Furthermore at the time of writing a vehicle owner can have their unwanted vehicle collected free of charge from one of the two network providers (Car Take Back and Autogreen) or receive money for delivering a vehicle to an ATF, provided that the car is complete and free from additional waste.

Why are there Abandoned Vehicles?

The following table, Figure 1, shows the tonnage of abandoned vehicles collected between 2002-03 and 2005-06.

Figure 1 – Total Abandoned Vehicle arisings by year



Source ²

Figure 1 shows that the incidents of abandoned vehicles in Wales dropped in the four years leading to 2005. This is clearly a very positive trend. However, the exact number of vehicles abandoned in Wales is not known. This is because abandoned vehicles are recorded as municipal waste when collected by local authorities, but not when collected by contractors on behalf of local authorities. Therefore only the vehicles collected by local authorities themselves shows up in Environment Agency data on fly-tipping.

There is no single reason why people abandon vehicles. Instead there are many possible reasons that have existed over the past, many of which have now been addressed.

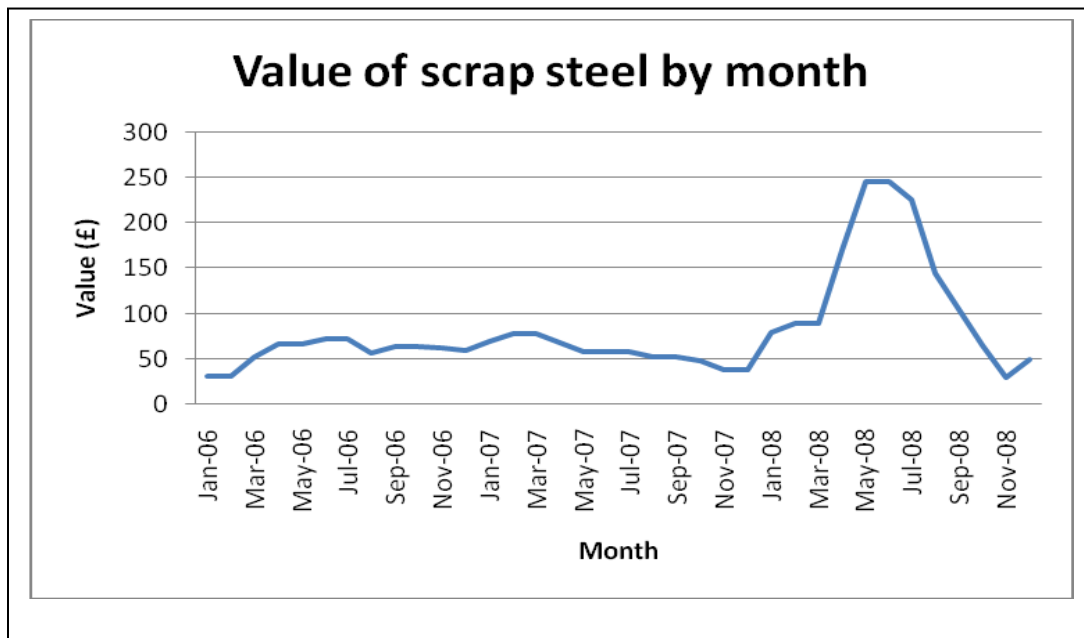
For a short period prior to January 1st 2007, owners of end of life vehicles had to pay to dispose of their vehicles. This marked a significant change as before then owners of such vehicles could expect to receive a sum (scrap metal value) of money.

² <http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/tableviewer/document.aspx?FileId=726>

The vehicle licensing and registration system (operated by the DVLA) has been identified as 'historically weak'. This was seen to make it easy to illegally dispose of a vehicle without being caught, prior to the passing of the Road Vehicle (Registration and Licensing) (Amendment) (No 3) Regulations 2003.³

Often cited as a contributory factor as to the tendency to illegally dispose of a vehicle is the value assigned to scrap metal⁴. This is supported by Figure 2 which shows the price of '12A new production heavy steel scrap' over the previous three years.

Figure 2 – Value of Steel by month



Source:⁵

The chart demonstrates the extent to which the value of scrap metal can fluctuate, ranging from £30 per ton to £245 per ton. An article in the national press linked the rise in vehicle theft in London with the rise in value of scrap metal⁶. The claim is based on an assumption that criminals have stolen cars with the intent on selling the vehicle as scrap metal.

³ Steve Merrall & Sylvia Chenery, February 2005, Arson Control Forum, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London

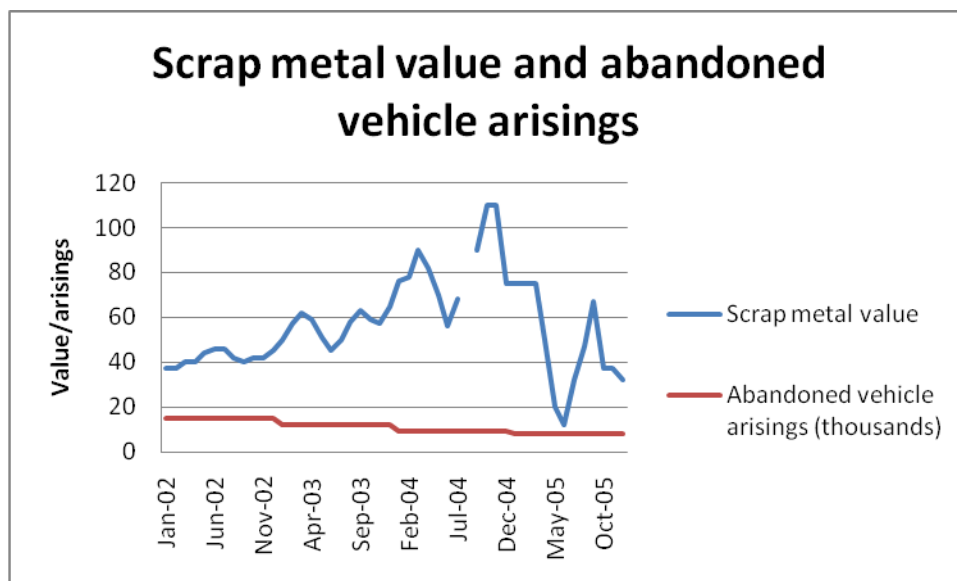
⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo011022/debtext/11022-33.htm>

⁵ www.letsrecycle.com

⁶ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1029756/Criminals-cash-rising-price-scrap-metal-Thieves-stealing-scraping-family-cars-cash.html>

Figure 3, below, shows the value of scrap metal alongside the arisings of abandoned vehicles in the period from 2002 to 2005.

Figure 3 – Scrap metal Value and abandoned vehicle arisings



From 2002 to 2004, the value of scrap metal generally rises, whilst abandoned vehicle arisings gradually dropped. There is therefore some correlation; however 2005 saw a significant drop in the value of scrap metal, yet it appears that abandoned vehicle arisings continued to drop. As such it could be said that the value of scrap metal has partial significance on the tendency for vehicles to be abandoned and that there must be other factors contributing to the number of abandoned vehicle arisings.

The annual data of abandoned vehicle arisings within Figure 3 may overlook any monthly variation. It is possible that monthly data on abandoned vehicle arisings would show greater correlation with scrap metal value than Figure 3.

Burnt out abandoned vehicles

Clearly many stolen cars will be recovered or continue to be used on the road network, however many stolen vehicles will be abandoned and burnt. The number of deliberate road vehicle fires recorded by the fire and rescue service across the UK in 2007 was 35 000.⁷ Research primarily concerned with arson has suggested that of those vehicles that have not been reported stolen, in the majority of cases, fires will have been set as a means of disposing

⁷ Communities and Local Government, 21/11/2008, Fire Statistics Monitor.

of the vehicle, rather than it having been abandoned and then set on fire by a third party. Such vehicles tend to be unlicensed and/or untaxed, suggesting that the motivation for the fire is the destruction of identifying evidence. An estimated 50% of deliberate primary vehicle fires occur in vehicles that have been previously reported stolen and the primary motivation was thought to be destruction of forensic evidence, particularly DNA.⁸

Implications

Abandoned vehicles represent a potential threat to public health through battery acid and the presence of fluoro-elastomers. As a fire hazard, abandoned vehicles can also release noxious substances into a locality. Abandoned vehicles have also been cited as providing opportunities for 'casual crime'⁹. The cost of removing, storing and disposing of abandoned vehicles is £26m per annum.¹⁰

The research by Steve Merrall & Sylvia Chenery, outlined above, describes a link between stolen and burned out vehicles. Having been stolen and possibly involved in other crime, it is very possible that a vehicle will be burnt out. Despite being below average for England and Wales,, Wales does have the fifth highest rate for vehicle thefts (at 715 per 10,000 households in 2006-07, compared with 723 per 10,000 households in England and Wales as whole).¹¹ This does provide potential for a high rate of car burn out.

The financial burden of a burnt out vehicle can be significantly higher than that of any other abandoned vehicle. Initially there may be a Fire and Rescue Service call out, which stands at approximately £1,500 per response. On top are the increased clean-up costs. Additionally whilst Fires and Rescue Services across the country have some use for abandoned vehicles for training purposes, they have no use for burnt out vehicles.

How to deal with Abandoned Vehicles?

Each of Wales' 22 local authorities has stated the way in which it deals with abandoned vehicles. Some go so far as to provide targets for response times but all state what they consider to be an abandoned vehicle and the procedure for them investigating and potentially removing such vehicles. Details can be found on the websites of each local authority.

⁸ Steve Merrall & Sylvia Chenery, February 2005, Arson Control Forum, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London

⁹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/impact-assessment/pdf/clean-neighbourhoods-ria.pdf>

¹⁰ DEFRA, <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/impact-assessment/pdf/clean-neighbourhoods-ria.pdf>

¹¹ Crime in England and Wales 2006-07, 19 July 2007, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/40382313/statistics/4038211014151111/crime-2007/sb32-2007.pdf?lang=en>

The following table, Figure 3, describes the recognised ways in which to deal with vehicles abandoned in various ways.

Figure 3 – Schemes to tackle Abandoned Vehicles

Type of scheme	Purpose	Issues to consider
Preventing vehicles from becoming abandoned		
End of Life Collections	Reduce the supply of low value vehicles that may subsequently be abandoned. Vehicle owners are usually charged a small (subsidised) fee to collect and dispose of their vehicle.	These schemes need to be publicised within the relevant communities where abandoned vehicles tend to be found. A procedure for reporting and subsequently collecting vehicles needs to be established.
Basic Vehicle Amnesties	Reduce the supply of low value vehicles that may subsequently be abandoned. Amnesties usually offer to scrap vehicles free of charge.	Usually run for a time-limited period, these schemes need to be well publicised to achieve a good uptake.
Intensive Vehicle Amnesties	Reduce the supply of low value vehicles that may subsequently be abandoned. Amnesties usually offer to scrap vehicles free of charge.	Intensive schemes require staff to identify potential candidates for the amnesty, which can be resource intensive. May also include the threat of subsequent recovery of costs and prosecution should a vehicle offered an amnesty be later found abandoned.
Auction House/ Motor Trader Removals	Reduce the number of low value vehicles being sold into the community.	Requires the agreement of car dealerships to scrap vehicles under a certain value. This can be hard to reach agreement on and can be time consuming. Needs continual negotiation as new dealers enter the scheme.
Removal of abandoned vehicles		
Standard Abandoned Vehicle Removals	Remove abandoned vehicles before they are burnt out	The most common type of scheme in operation, in which vehicles are removed within seven days, or within 24 hours (where the vehicle has no value). Slow removal can result in other abandoned vehicles appearing or in the vehicle being burnt out.
Fast Track Abandoned	Remove abandoned vehicles before they are burnt out	Suitable for areas where there is a high risk of

Vehicle Removals		abandoned vehicles being set on fire. These schemes are more expensive because they require immediate action by the vehicle removal contractor.
Commercial Premises Removals	Remove abandoned vehicles on private property before they are burnt out	Can be operated similar to a standard vehicle removal scheme. Companies with abandoned vehicles on their premises can be charged a fee for the removal of the vehicle. This can generate a small revenue for the project.
Removal of burnt out vehicle		
Burnt Out Vehicle Removals	Remove vehicles that may be a hazard to the public and to improve the appearance of an area	Vehicle removal contractors should have planning permission for the storage and destruction of burnt out vehicles as these are classed as hazardous waste.

Source: ¹²

How to deal with nuisance vehicles?

The RAC Foundation says that investigating and removing nuisance vehicles costs local authorities £6 m a year. ¹³

Untaxed vehicle

If the nuisance vehicle in question is untaxed, it can be reported to the local branch of the DVLA. The DVLA will require details such as the make, model, number plate and location of the vehicle. Untaxed may be confiscated and many end up being auctioned off or crushed.

Vehicles for sale on a road

A vehicle can be regarded as a nuisance if it is on a street being displayed for sale and exploiting the parking space available to residents. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (CNEA 2005) can in some cases help resolve such issues. The legislation means an offence can be committed if an individual is responsible for two or more vehicles being advertised for sale within 500m of one another.

¹² ODPM, April 2004, Arson Control Forum

¹³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4180751.stm>

An alternative mode of enforcement in such cases can be through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Of particular use may be section 224 of the Town and Country Planning Act Control of Advertisements Regulations 1992. This can piece of legislation can also be implemented on vehicles located on grass verges.

Vehicles being repaired on a road

The CNEA 2005 brought about an offence for vehicular works to be carried out on street for the purposes of running a business or for financial gain. There is also potential for an offence to have been committed when the carrying out of works gives reasonable cause of annoyance to people in the vicinity.

Tyres

Besides abandoned vehicles themselves, dumped tyres can also significantly impact on an area. This can be most apparent when businesses in the tyre industry choose to dump illegally. The result can mean hundreds of tyres being dumped at a single site at once, resulting in many thousands of tyres over the course of years. The impact of individuals illegally disposing of tyres can also be significant and problematic; often resulting in tyres broadly dispersed and in areas that are difficult to access.

The UK produces 450,000 tonnes of used tyres each year that have to be reused or disposed of somehow.¹⁴ It is estimated that local authorities, landowners, industry and the emergency services pay out over £2.3 million every year in investigating and clearing illegally dumped tyres.¹⁵ The Environment Agency has recognised the risk that illegally dumped tyres pose to both public health and the natural environment, which is partly why it has launched a Tyre Watch programme.

The EU Landfill Directive introduced a ban on whole tyres being landfilled in July 2003. The ban on shredded tyres came into force in 2006. The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2007 (Article 5 (3) (d)) states that 'whole and shredded tyres are banned from disposal at landfills. The exception to allowing tyres at landfill sites is for use as an engineering material.¹⁶ In addition used tyres are a controlled waste and their keeping, transporting and depositing requires the relevant license, issued by the Environment Agency. There is therefore a financial cost to legally dispose of tyres. Consequently people may risk disposing of tyres illegally in attempt to avert the cost.

Incidents of fly-tipped tyres should be reported to the Environment Agency Wales on 0800 807 060. Many of Wales' local authorities also encourage residents to report to them cases of unmarked vehicles transporting tyres. Local authorities will require details such as the registration number of the vehicle in question.

Substantial quantities of used tyres are currently utilised in a variety of ways. Most notably perhaps is the use of tyres as fuel in cement kilns. Trials are being run to pyrolise tyres into their

¹⁴ EA, <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/waste/32152.aspx>

¹⁵ EA, <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/waste/32152.aspx>

¹⁶ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/epp/documents/landfill-guidance.pdf>

constituent parts of rubber, carbon, gas, oil and steel with a view to reusing such parts. It is understood that the market for tyre granulate is growing with use predominantly in carpet underlay and on artificial sports field surfaces. Again trials are being made into the use of granulate as an aggregate replacement in concrete and for use in road surfaces. An established use has emerged for tyres in landfill sites as a leachate drainage layer and further engineering possibilities for tyres are being explored.¹⁷

The Environment Agency appears to be taking a lead role in dealing with used tyres. In working with WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), a draft Quality Protocol has been produced and consulted on which is intended to make it easier and cheaper for industry to reprocess used tyres into valuable products (the draft Quality Protocol can be viewed at http://qpyr1.dialoguebydesign.net/docs/QP_Tyres.pdf?lang=e).¹⁸

The Used Tyre Working Group has put together a list of companies registered to carry out the tyre collection and recovery disposal process. An up to date list of companies based in Wales can be found at www.tyredisposal.co.uk.

Welsh Case Studies

The following case studies have been selected as examples of ways in which to deal with abandoned vehicles and tyres.

At the time of writing, Bayliss Recovery Ltd. collect, store and dispose of abandoned and unwanted vehicles for five local authorities; Bridgend, Cardiff, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan. It does so at no cost to either residents or the local authorities in question. Bayliss Recovery Ltd. also implements this service across Forestry Commission land in South Wales. The service relies on local authorities and the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service reporting incidences of abandoned vehicles directly to Bayliss Recovery Ltd. who make the appropriate response. It is made more responsive through coordination with Dragon Recovery (a vehicle recovery firm based in Cardiff) who collect and temporarily store vehicles before collection by Bayliss Recovery Ltd.

Operation Cubit is a joint initiative between local authorities, the Police force, the Fire and Rescue Service and the DVLA. It is replicated across the country with a view to reducing the number of abandoned vehicles (including burnt out vehicles) and untaxed vehicle on streets. The profile of this initiative is raised by the prospect of vehicles potentially being crushed.

In South Wales, periodical action days see the joint working of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, the DVLA, and the Police. On such days, all parties are involved in and benefit from reducing the number of abandoned vehicles on streets.

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council has used a varied approach to dealing with abandoned vehicles. It offers a vehicle collection service (charged) year round, implements periodical amnesties (whereby vehicles can be disposed of free of charge), and carries out Operation Cubit several times annually. The area has witnessed a decrease in both the number

¹⁷ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/topics/tyres.htm>

¹⁸ <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/waste/39025.aspx>

of abandoned vehicles reported to the authority and in the number of abandoned vehicles collected by the authority, as seen in Figure 4:

Figure 4 – Number of Abandoned Vehicles reported to Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council 1999 - 2007

Year	Vehicles reported	Vehicles removed
1999	1,654	657
2000	2,215	903
2001	2,400	1,062
2002	3,016	1,418
2003	3,315	1,442
2004	2,393	634
2005	1,907	565
2006	1,369	329
2007	937	131
Total	19,206	7,141

Source ¹⁹

The data in Figure 3 suggests that the approach of combined vehicle collection, vehicle amnesties and Operation Cubit has successfully lessened the prevalence of abandoned vehicles in Rhondda Cynon Taff.

300 vehicles were removed from one identified problem site in North Wales in a joint scheme between the Environment Agency Wales, the Police and Denbighshire County Council. This followed a court case in which the land owner had been ordered to clear the site. ²⁰

A local example of tyre use is Bayliss Recovery Ltd., which can recycle 1000 tyres each week. The company uses a specially designed baler to compress tyres into blocks for use as flood defenses, embankments and foundations etc.

Environwise, based in Baglan, Neath Port Talbot, is able to recycle 30 000 tonnes of used tyres annually. The tyres are treated with liquid nitrogen and processed into a crumb for use primarily on artificial sports pitches and rubber flooring. The steel product is extracted in this process and sent to steel works. ²¹

A joint venture between Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Keep Wales Tidy and the Environment Agency Wales saw a tyre amnesty take place over a week. The project specifically targeted tyres stored in and around households with a view to collecting them before becoming fly-tipped. Over 300 residents used the scheme and 1861 tyres were collected and recycled. It

¹⁹ <http://www.rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/hcst/content.hcst?lang=en&textonly=false&xNodeID=372>

²⁰ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/north_east/4751447.stm

²¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/6914551.stm>

was necessary to advertise and then supervise the collection sites. Along with skip hire and recycling fees, the total cost stood at £7640.²²

A very different response was used at a former quarry site near Doncaster where it was believed that upwards of three million tyres had accumulated over a period of thirty years. In a coordinated project involving the Environment Agency and Doncaster Council, many tyres were collected for recycling, and the rest were left in situ and covered with a membrane. This membrane consisted of a mixture of shale and limestone to replicate local conditions and was then planted with a seed mix and left as a reclaimed nature area.²³

Policy

The Towards Zero Waste (consultation) document, produced by the Welsh Assembly Government, refers to a 70% recycling target for municipal waste by 2025. Whilst this is a very admirable target, Keep Wales Tidy understands that abandoned vehicles will be excluded from the calculation and therefore from the target. This understanding is partly based on wording from the paper; Future Directions for Municipal Waste Management in Wales – Proposed Targets and Actions, 17 April 2009, which states that recycling targets after 2009/10 will be based on all municipal waste arisings and all municipal waste recycling not including abandoned vehicles.

²² Keep Wales Tidy, Tyre Amnesty March 2007 Event Report

²³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/south_yorkshire/7238882.stm

Conclusions

Local authorities have a duty to remove abandoned vehicles and they are now well placed to deal with such occurrences. The time taken for a local authority to remove a vehicle can now be as short as 24 hours for the least valuable vehicles. Meanwhile the Road Vehicle (Registration and Licensing) (Amendment) (No 3) Regulations 2003 has been seen to have added accountability to vehicle ownership and responsibility. This has made it harder for unwanted vehicles to simply be disposed of illegally. Additionally local authorities are well advised as to the various solutions to deal with abandoned vehicles (see Figure 3). Together these developments can be seen to have contributed to a fall in vehicles abandoned.

Members of the public can be prosecuted if found to have abandoned a vehicle. Additionally it is clearly a positive development that members of the public can legally dispose of their unwanted vehicles free of charge. However there is the potential complication of the vehicle in question requiring towing to an Authorised Treatment Facility at a cost to the owner. In such circumstances the service which some of Wales' local authorities provide whereby unwanted vehicles are collected at little or no cost to the owner, can be beneficial. It is possible that vehicles be 'abandoned' despite being located near to the owner's residence. In such circumstances a free collection service and indeed a prompt collection service is likely to improve local environmental quality. There is some evidence to suggest that a local authority in applying targeted and multiple approaches to dealing with abandoned vehicles can have positive results (see RCT CBC case study).

It has been shown that the incidents of abandoned vehicles appear to be falling. This is very positive; however Wales-wide data on the total number of abandoned vehicles collected is imprecise. Whilst it is encouraging that data exists on fly-tipping and further that instances of vehicles collected are recorded, it should be remembered that current data is only illustrative. Without precise data, it cannot be said with absolute certainty that the problem of abandoned vehicles is shrinking. Additionally comparisons between local authorities may be distorted when considering that vehicles collected on behalf of local authorities are not recorded in official data.

It has been demonstrated that an important factor in the tendency for vehicles to be abandoned is the value assigned to scrap metal. It is understood that the more valuable scrap metal is then the less likely it is that vehicles will be abandoned. It is important therefore that scrap metal has a consistent value so that there is always a financial incentive for members of the public to dispose of their vehicles responsibly. Clearly market forces play a role yet there must be scope for owners to receive a reasonable financial reward for their vehicle at the point of disposal, regardless of market value at that point in time. This would necessitate the safe storage of vehicles until the market value of scrap returns to an acceptable level.

Burnt out vehicles prove more problematic than abandoned vehicles. Their collection and disposal is more complicated and costly. Additionally the implications of a burnt out vehicle on local environmental quality are more acute, bringing with them potential public health risks. Whilst many vehicles are stolen and quickly burnt out, it is important that every effort is made to promptly collect abandoned vehicles before they too become burnt out.

This paper has identified examples of companies recycling tyres and creating various marketable products. As such there is potential for future innovation to generate value from

tyres and possibly from other constituent parts of vehicles. The Environment Agency is leading on a protocol in this vein.

At the point of writing this paper it is too early to observe if the Vehicle Discount Scheme (the 'scrappage scheme') has impacted on the tendency for owners to unlawfully abandon vehicles. However the potential increase in value assigned to vehicles of ten years or more may well mean the difference for some vehicle owners between abandoning and responsibly disposing. The first indications appeared rather significant with 38 vehicle manufacturers signing up and reportedly one in five new vehicle orders coming as a scrappage order over the first period.²⁴

²⁴ Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 29 May 2009

Recommendations

- Local authorities should make every effort to respond to reports of abandoned vehicles as quickly as possible. In doing so the various approaches to dealing with abandoned vehicles should be utilised;
- In order to prevent vehicles being abandoned, local authorities should strive to offer a free service of unwanted vehicle collection. If this is not feasible then periodical 'amnesties' should be carried out;
- The role of the private sector collecting abandoned vehicles should be considered. An ongoing arrangement suggests the possibility of private companies collecting abandoned vehicles on behalf of and at no cost to local authorities;
- Data on abandoned vehicles should be standardised in order to present a fully accurate picture and to allow cross local authority comparison;
- Targets on recycling abandoned vehicles should be included in the Welsh Assembly Government's Towards Zero Waste document, be it under the heading of municipal waste or otherwise. There should also be clarification as to which of the five sector plans mentioned in the document will take account of abandoned vehicles; and
- As part of the evaluation of the impact of the recently introduced Vehicle Discount Scheme consideration should be given to a reduction in abandoned vehicles.