

Fly-tipping “running out of control” but major incidents disappear in Epsom and Ewell

27 February 2026



Fly-tipping on an industrial scale is at risk of “running out of control” across England, with organised criminal gangs blamed for dumping tens of thousands of tonnes of rubbish in the countryside and urban areas.

Latest government figures show 52,000 large-scale fly-tipping incidents — involving at least a tipper-lorry load — were recorded by councils in England in 2024-25, up sharply from 31,000 before the pandemic.

Campaigners say the crime has become highly organised, lucrative and relatively low-risk for offenders.

A spokesperson for the Chartered Institute of Waste Management said: “Waste crime is at risk of running out of control across the UK. It is evident that waste crime at all levels continues to cause misery and anxiety for local communities and causes real damage to local environments and local economies. These are crooks and cowboy operators, often organised criminal gangs, deliberately profiting from other’s misery, from polluting our environment and exploiting loopholes in the system.”

The Countryside Alliance said: “Fly-tipping is not just an environmental nuisance — it has become a serious and organised crime issue and rural communities are on the frontline... For them it is low-risk and highly profitable... contributing to a criminal market worth an estimated £1 billion a year.”

Epsom and Ewell large-scale incidents fall to zero

Figures analysed by the Epsom and Ewell Times show a striking local trend.

Epsom and Ewell recorded 30 large fly-tipping incidents in 2019-20, falling to 19 in 2020-21 and 14 in 2021-22. Since then, none have been recorded, with zero incidents reported in 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25.

This suggests large-scale dumping in the borough has been eliminated — at least in the official statistics — contrasting with rising national totals.

However, smaller fly-tipping incidents, which make up the majority of cases, are recorded separately and remain a persistent issue across the country.

Who deals with fly-tipping locally

Responsibility for tackling fly-tipping is shared between councils and national regulators.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is responsible for clearing illegally dumped waste on public land in the borough, investigating incidents and prosecuting offenders. The Council can also issue fixed penalty notices.

The Environment Agency deals with larger, organised or hazardous waste crime, including illegal waste sites operated by criminal gangs.

Private landowners are responsible for removing waste dumped on their own land, though authorities may investigate and prosecute those responsible.

Tough penalties available — but few offenders caught

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence carrying severe penalties. Courts can impose unlimited fines and prison sentences of up to five years. Vehicles used in dumping can be seized and destroyed, and offenders receive a criminal record.

Councils can also issue fixed penalty notices of up to £1,000.

However, enforcement remains limited. Nationally, only 663 fines exceeding £1,000 have been issued since 2019.

One recent major case saw a prolific offender ordered to pay more than £1.2 million following an Environment Agency investigation.

Criminal gangs and fake waste firms driving problem

Experts say organised crime is increasingly behind large-scale fly-tipping. Criminals often pose as legitimate waste

clearance companies, charging households and businesses before dumping waste illegally to avoid disposal costs. The illegal waste market is estimated to be worth around £1 billion a year.

Local improvement but national concern remains

The disappearance of major fly-tipping incidents in Epsom and Ewell will be welcome news locally. But nationally the problem remains serious, with experts warning illegal dumping continues to expand and new sites regularly appearing.

Residents are urged to use only licensed waste carriers and report fly-tipping to their local council.

Those caught face potentially severe consequences — though many offenders still escape justice.

Sam Jones - Reporter



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