

‘GETTING TROLLEYED’

Have dumped shopping trolleys been a bother on your sites? Cannock Chase District Council Countryside Service has made some progress in the battle with the supermarkets. Simon Siddle, Countryside Officer, Community Involvement, has written the following account of how the Countryside Service dealt with the travelling trolleys.

Are supermarket trolleys walking themselves onto your sites and deciding to stay or go for a dip in your watercourses? Upon starting my current job I inherited the task of liaising with the local supermarket with regard to the many trolleys that found their way onto our sites and inevitably into the water courses. This could be seen as yet another example of supermarkets externalising their operating costs in the pursuit of profit.

FIND ONE GET ONE FREE

When we find a trolley on our sites we have a duty of care to remove it, yet on trying to communicate the scale of the problem to the supermarket next door I hit a wall of unhelpfulness. The supermarket hardly ever answered the phone. When they did it sometimes took a long time to get an answer. Their usual reply when told there were numerous trolleys in our ponds and watercourses was that they would send the trolley boy out to collect them. To be fair, the spotty seventeen-year-old managed to collect some of the easier trolleys to reach but a large amount still had to be removed from pools by the countryside service using specialist equipment (a grappling hook).

I continually expressed my concerns to the local supermarket but received ‘very little help’. Local residents asked “do you look after the pool with all the trolleys in it?” They also had complained to the supermarket but found there was “very little help” to be had. We suggested that the supermarket put pound coin slots in their trolleys but they refused, stating we were in a deprived area, even though the budget supermarkets in our area had such a scheme and none of their trolleys ended up on our sites.

How Would Like To Pay?

Eventually I contacted the Environment Agency and discovered that if the trolleys were in any water course they came under the remit of the Water Resources Act 1991, Part 3 Control of Pollution. This states that it is an offence to cause or knowingly permit the discharge of any poisonous, noxious or polluting matter, or solid waste matter, to Controlled Waters and fines of up to £20000 may be imposed upon summary conviction. Under the “Polluter Pays” principle the Agency is able to recover its costs of dealing with pollution by virtue of section 161(3) Water Resources Act 1991 as amended by the Environment Act 1995.

The Agency needed to be contacted about all trolleys in water courses on our sites. When we removed the trolleys the Agency was able to invoice the supermarket in question for the works and operations carried out when dealing with each incident - £75 a trolley with the possibility of more fines if the problem continued. We then had the great pleasure of undertaking some direct action. We took all the trolleys we could find (plus the detritus one finds on a trolley removed from a water course) and

publicly deposited them at the front entrance to the supermarket complete with bio-hazard symbols. The trolleys were shortly followed to the supermarket by the Environment Agency's bill.

DO YOU WANT CASHBACK?

After these actions and some more correspondence explaining the law to the supermarket, the supermarket approached the countryside service to offer to pay us directly for the removal of the trolleys. A fee of £15 a trolley was agreed, admittedly low, but we were trying to establish the principle. Our first month of collecting trolleys netted us £350, which we negotiated to go into our sites management budget, followed by another £300 the month after. This caused ripples within the supermarket's management. Our last bill for £150 has yet to be paid as the supermarket's head office has said that all invoices are now to be sent to them. This reneged on our agreement (which was cash on delivery) and we still await payment with bated breath. As someone once said "it all helps".

Funnily enough this supermarket, the one that originally had denied all responsibility for the trolley problem, has just implemented a new scheme at its store which prevents trolleys being removed from the premises. So far none of these new trolleys have made their way onto our sites.

If supermarket trolleys are driving you off your trolley, they need not, as we have found a way to fight back. This whole process took about two years from originally involving the Environment Agency to attaining today's trolley free sites. I hope 'this little bit helps' anyone out there with a trolley problem.

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