



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Inquiry into Used Tyre Disposal:
Ballymena Borough Council and
Newline Waste Solutions**

20 October 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT**

**Inquiry into Used Tyre Disposal: Ballymena Borough Council and
Newline Waste Solutions**

20 October 2011

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)
Mr Simon Hamilton (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Willie Clarke
Mr John Dallat
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Francie Molloy
Lord Morrow

Witnesses:

Mr Robin Cherry)	
Mr Greg Dornan)	Ballymena Borough Council
Mrs Nicola McCall)	
Mrs Sinead Sargent)	
Mr Brendan Carragher)	Newline Waste Solutions
Ms Diane Roberts)	

The Chairperson:

Today, we have with us Nicola McCall, deputy director of environmental services; Sinead Sargent, the senior environmental health officer; Greg Dornan, head of policy; and Alderman Robin Cherry, deputy mayor. You are all very welcome, and thank you very much for coming all the way from Ballymena to help us with the inquiry. I have seen the pictures that you sent us; they are quite lively and colourful. You may give a presentation of 10 or 15 minutes, after which members will ask questions.

Mr Robin Cherry (Ballymena Borough Council):

Good morning. Ballymena Borough Council welcomes the inquiry that the Committee is undertaking into waste tyres, and we are very pleased to have been given the opportunity to be involved and to share the details of our experience of the tyre-marking system operated by Ballymena Borough Council since 2003. We also intend to make recommendations for bridging the current monitoring and enforcement gap regarding the illegal disposal of waste tyres.

I will introduce our team. I am Alderman Cherry, former chair of the council's environment committee. Representing the body corporate, I will outline the rationale for introducing the scheme and how it links into our community planning ethos, which aims to improve the quality of life of all our citizens. Sinead Sargent, senior environmental health officer, is the person who manages and implements the project on the ground. After we have outlined the detail of the scheme, Nicola McCall, head of environmental health, will provide some recommendations on the way forward. Greg Dornan, head of policy, is responsible for the development and delivery of all council policy.

Although councils can implement practical initiatives, such as the marking scheme, it is our opinion that, to fully address the issue, a more strategic and overarching approach, including both monitoring and enforcement, is required. The council's role in the tyre-marking scheme, and its motivation in introducing and sustaining the programme, is to fulfil its civic leadership role and to ensure that the borough remains an attractive, clean and safe environment and a welcoming place

for all.

It is not our legal duty, but our civic duty, to carry out that work. Civic leaders are committed to the community planning process and feel very strongly that joined-up public services are the only way to address citizens' needs. I and the other elected members of the borough council see our role as to oversee and influence all public services, not just the 5% that we manage. I will hand over to Sinead to introduce the scheme.

Mrs Sinead Sargent (Ballymena Borough Council):

First, as Alderman Cherry said, we very much welcome the inquiry that the Committee is undertaking into waste tyres and are pleased to be given the opportunity to share the details of our experience.

The scheme was developed by the council and is implemented on the ground by our borough warden, who, prior to the bonfire season, marks tyres in depots and other retail premises. The scheme arose through work with the community and bonfire organisers to try to ensure that bonfires in our area were as environmentally friendly as possible. We believe that the scheme was possible only through the good relations among councils, elected members, officers and the community. We became aware that there was, and still is, an issue with tyres being placed on bonfires, often by persons unknown or unidentifiable. The council also acknowledged the larger-scale criminality related to the smaller-scale illegal disposal of waste tyres.

I will outline the legislative base for dealing with illegally deposited tyres. As the legislation stands, responsibility for the monitoring and enforcement of the proper disposal of used tyres sits firmly with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). At present, a council has no legislative remit pertaining to waste tyre disposal, illegally or otherwise, unless it happens on council property.

We believe that, if the powers set out in the existing legislation were maximised by the NIEA, the problems associated with the illegal disposal of tyres would be minimised. The council's experience shows that, in the past, the NIEA appeared not to have taken a proactive approach to

the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of tyre disposal.

I will now describe the process in Ballymena. The council, having identified the ongoing monitoring and enforcement gap, decided to be proactive. Hence, in 2003, we began to visit local tyre depots and other relevant retailers to mark all waste tyres. Tyres at each outlet were marked with a different colour and/or motif to identify tyres belonging to those premises. The photographs in our written submission demonstrate that. The purpose of marking was to aid identification should tyres appear on a bonfire or any other illegal dump at a later stage. It is a simple scheme, but it had a positive effect on reducing breaches of the legislation.

Furthermore, the approach was very much welcomed by the companies involved, as they felt that it offered them some protection from intimidation or from being put under any undue influence to hand over tyres illegally. The owners and managers of the businesses continue to welcome the approach taken by council and have actively and voluntarily involved themselves in the tyre-marking scheme.

Although we would be the first to admit that the scheme is by no means perfect, it was introduced in an attempt to be proactive and address the existing monitoring and enforcement gap. Prior to the tyre-marking scheme, every bonfire in our borough had a significant number of tyres present — around 100 or more per bonfire. Since the scheme's inception, the amount of tyres on bonfires and illegal sites decreased to the point at which there were either none or only a minimal number. Critically, to date, no marked tyres from our local depots have appeared on any bonfires in the borough. However, in 2010, unfortunately, the bonfire season seemed to allow an increase in the amount of unmarked tyres appearing on local bonfires. Due to the success of the scheme, we can infer that those unmarked tyres came from outside our borough. The absence of any marked tyres supports the view that, to date, the local scheme in Ballymena has been successful.

In our view, proactive monitoring and enforcement are critical. That is the only, and the best, way fully to address the ongoing issue. We were pleased to note that, during the NIEA's oral evidence to the Committee, Mr Foster said that the agency was pursuing a number of cases involving the illegal waste disposal of tyres, and we very much welcome that approach.

However, it is concerning that the council has not been aware of any such enforcement plans. That highlights the possible communication gap between local councils and the NIEA and, therefore, the need for a joined-up approach.

In 2006, Ballymena Borough Council adopted a joined-up approach with the NIEA and asked it to become involved in the scheme. During annual visits to the tyre depots, council officers were accompanied by an NIEA officer, and, while we marked the tyres, the NIEA officer monitored compliance of the tyre businesses in our borough under its duty of care legislative requirements.

Both agencies were highly visible on the ground, as a result of which the NIEA secured a successful prosecution against one premises for the non-production of appropriate documentation, and a further two premises received warning letters. Unfortunately, that joint approach has not been repeated. It was merely a one-off event, mainly because of resource implications in the NIEA. Those joint visits communicated a strong message to all concerned; they made a positive difference and delivered results. The NIEA stated in its written submission that it intends:

“to carry out an awareness raising exercise for retailers and distributors underpinned by a key stakeholder seminar to highlight and emphasise their responsibilities under Duty of Care”.

The council would very much welcome a joined-up approach similar to the 2006 joint operation.

There is, undoubtedly, a need for more joined-up working between the council and the NIEA to address the tyre issue and the wider issues of illegal waste disposal. The Committee will be aware of the fly-tipping protocol, which sets out the quantitative thresholds that determine the respective responsibilities of councils and the NIEA. In the proposed protocol, the thresholds are set at 20 cubic metres for non-hazardous waste and two cubic metres for hazardous waste. Any illegal deposit at or below those thresholds would be dealt with by councils. The Department of the Environment (DOE) proposed those thresholds despite the majority of respondents to the consultation document opting for levels similar to those in Scotland: six cubic metres for non-hazardous waste and no hazardous waste responsibility for councils. Some councils, including Ballymena, have formally rejected the proposed protocol, as it has the potential to impose a large burden on councils and, ultimately, the ratepayer.

The council calculated the projected cost of disposing of 20 cubic metres of non-hazardous waste to be approximately £2,280. Potentially, that would be for each complaint. In addition, under the NILAS (Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme) target, the council would be liable for possible penalties, which are set at £150 a ton over the council's allowance. A contract for treatment and disposal centrally operated by the NIEA seems to be the most appropriate way to deal with the hazardous waste element. Similar concerns about the fly-tipping protocol have also been expressed by other councils, the three main waste management groups in the Province and NILGA (Northern Ireland Local Government Association). I will now pass over to Nicola, who will outline our conclusion and recommendations.

Mrs Nicola McCall (Ballymena Borough Council):

Ballymena Borough Council feels that a proper joined-up approach and agreed protocol are required to tackle the problem effectively. There must also be a good working relationship between the councils and the NIEA, with clear and informative communication in both directions. As long as the current gap in monitoring and enforcement continues, so will the associated criminal activity. Under those circumstances, a positive initiative led by any one council will only ever provide a partial solution. There must be a more joined-up, strategic and overarching approach, which, in the long run, is probably the best option for the citizen, the environment and the public purse.

Ballymena Borough Council is very willing to work with the NIEA and any other appropriate body to improve our tyre-marking scheme and to advise anybody who wants to take forward something similar. That said, we recognise that it is not, and can never be, a solution on its own. I assure the Committee that Ballymena Borough Council is very willing and prepared to assist in any joined-up approach that can be developed for monitoring and enforcement. We view that as a crucial tool in trying to tackle the illegal disposal of waste tyres, and, if required, we would be happy to pilot such an initiative.

We would like to put forward a few recommendations. We have covered most of them, but I will summarise. We strongly feel that a more strategic, overarching, joined-up approach to monitoring and enforcement must be implemented to tackle the problem. We must be proactive

on the ground. The council strongly recommends a joined-up approach similar to that adopted in 2006. That worked well, because it gave us a localised duty of care for enforcement. Such an approach could easily be rolled out to other local authorities to minimise the opportunity for any criminality associated with the disposal of tyres.

We recommend improved communication between local authorities and the NIEA. We would welcome being involved in the awareness-raising event that Mr Foster highlighted. We feel that local authorities could bring another perspective to that event and help to assist with awareness-raising. We strongly recommend that the proposed fly-tipping protocol be amended to reflect realistically the role of council and local government. Finally, we recommend that a pilot be run between local authorities and the NIEA, whereby proactive monitoring and enforcement would run alongside an initiative such as ours, the impact of which could be evaluated on the ground. Thank you for your time.

The Chairperson:

Greg, were you going to say something?

Mr Greg Dornan (Ballymena Borough Council):

No; you have heard the entire submission from Ballymena Borough Council.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your presentation. You certainly gave a thorough description of your scheme. I agree that there must be a strategic, joined-up approach with local government, because it deals, day and daily, with a lot of those issues on the ground.

Sinead, you pointed out that, although the tyres in your borough are marked, with the result that you do not find any marked tyres on local bonfires, you have found unmarked tyres from other council areas. That is a clear indication that it is not enough to have just one council marking tyres; all councils must do that. So we need a protocol to require other councils to do that, too. I am interested in hearing more about your scheme. How many wardens go out to mark tyres? How much does that type of work cost?

Mrs Sargent:

Our one warden has been key in the scheme's implementation. Over the years, our borough warden has established a good working relationship with the depots. Usually, he goes to premises and begins to mark the tyres around the end of April or the beginning of May. He needs to visit some depots weekly to make sure that the marking of additional waste tyres is continuing, and he visits other depots a little less often. However, right up until bonfire season, the visits are weekly. He visits a total of 13 premises in the borough. That gives you an indication of the time involved.

The Chairperson:

So the work is concentrated on the period before July, during which tyres are dumped on bonfires?

Mrs McCall:

Yes. It is important to start the scheme early enough in the year, prior to tyres being sourced.

Mr Hamilton:

Obviously, there is a problem, but, as Alderman Cherry identified, no council has a responsibility to address it; that is the duty of someone else. However, as is so often the case, if local government did not step in, nothing would be done. So I commend you for what you are trying to do.

I want to pick up on the tyre-marking scheme. With what are the tyres marked? There is anecdotal evidence that, because of initiatives in various council areas, including the sort of thing that you do, the number of tyres found at bonfires over the past number of years has dipped. It is, therefore, worrying that you found that the number of tyres increased last year. Is there any risk that the markings could be removed? A tyre that had been marked could then appear as an unmarked tyre.

Mrs Sargent:

You can see from the photograph that we provided that the markings on the tyres are substantial, and it would, therefore, take a substantial effort to remove them. Moreover, the feedback from the tyre depots is that they are no longer approached by people seeking tyres. The marking is a deterrent more than anything. Depots are not being approached, which is why they take comfort in the scheme and warmly welcome it.

Mr Hamilton:

Have you any evidence of neighbouring councils reporting that Ballymena tyres have appeared in their areas?

Mrs Sargent:

None.

Mr Hamilton:

Very good. You say that the scheme begins in April or May. It would take a big commitment by the council to operate the scheme all year round. However, if we wanted to act on a broader scale, we would have to consider that. Have you looked at rolling out the scheme? You have good evidence to support your contention that the scheme is successful. However, a January tyre could easily be dumped in July and kept somewhere. We have lots of evidence that tyres are stored in various places. Are you considering rolling out the scheme throughout the year?

Mrs Sargent:

We will welcome the Committee's recommendations, whether for a pilot scheme, or whatever. We are extremely open to suggestions. We would be the first to admit that the scheme is by no means perfect, but it is a good start in trying to be proactive in tackling the issue.

Mr Hamilton:

Given that you have no remit, power or authority to operate the scheme, it is a commendable effort. I am sure that, as you rightly said, it is not fail-safe. However, it is a good attempt, and it is worth looking at your scheme in greater detail. Thank you very much.

Mr W Clarke:

Thank you very much for your presentation. It is good to have a political representative here as well; Francie will be delighted by that. He gave off during last week's evidence session.

I pay tribute to the council for its initiative. It is very positive for a council to take on such an initiative, work in partnership with others and take the lead. It is refreshing to see.

Where are the majority of bonfires sited? Are they on Housing Executive, Roads Service or council property?

Mr Dornan:

The majority of bonfires are located on Housing Executive property, but we have a multi-agency approach to dealing with them. In February, all the agencies get round the table to decide on the best way forward. Usually, the first person whom a citizen will phone is his or her councillor. People seem to think that local government is responsible for bonfires.

Mr W Clarke:

How effective is the NIEA in dealing with this issue? Be honest.

Mrs McCall:

There is definitely a monitoring and enforcement gap. When the NIEA came out and worked with us that one time, it seemed to work well, but that was not repeated. When we refer issues to

the NIEA, we get no feedback on what is happening. If we go back and ask for feedback, the NIEA staff say that they cannot tell us. It is a difficult working relationship.

Mr W Clarke:

That sounds familiar.

Mrs McCall:

I do not like criticising any other agency.

Mr W Clarke:

I understand that.

Mr McGlone:

We have to hear the truth.

Mr W Clarke:

That is why the inquiry has been set up. We see gaps, too, and we are elected representatives. I asked about the Housing Executive, Roads Service and councils, because I would like the inquiry to recommend that the landowner be fined by the NIEA. If waste, tyres or anything else is dumped on Housing Executive property, the landowner responsible should be approached by the NIEA. That would make the various agencies focus on ensuring that that does not happen. They would have to take robust preventative measures to ensure that waste was not dumped on their land or, if it was, removed. You will never resolve the problem by bringing it down to the level of the individuals who leave the waste, because they cannot be identified. You need to place an onus on landowners to be more robust in their approach. That is why I asked the question about who owns the land.

You mentioned that some companies feel intimidated or under a certain amount of threat. Have you evidence, whether from organisations or individuals, of companies being intimidated? Has there been a PSNI response to that?

Mrs Sargent:

The evidence is purely anecdotal. When our borough warden was marking tyres, companies expressed their pleasure at seeing him, because they know that that, in itself, will act as a deterrent to anyone who might wish to request tyres.

Mr W Clarke:

So the marking of tyres provides good comfort.

Mrs Sargent:

Yes.

Mr W Clarke:

Have you any cases of tyres being illegally stored in the Ballymena borough?

Mrs Sargent:

Not that we are aware of.

Mr W Clarke:

Would building a traceability mechanism into tyres be beneficial, whether that was a microchip or some sort of barcode?

Mrs Sargent:

Anything that could assist would be beneficial.

Mr McGlone:

Thank you for your presentation. You seem to be carrying out valuable work in Ballymena. What is the cost to the ratepayer, through the public purse, of the warden engaged in marking tyres? That was touched on earlier, but I did not hear any detail. Much of the warden's work

seems to kick in around April. Is the warden engaged in other duties elsewhere for the rest of the year? I want to get a handle on that. It is good that you have taken the initiative, but it is an initiative that should probably have been taken by the NIEA.

Mrs McCall:

The scheme makes up only part of the work of the gentleman concerned. He is fully employed by the council carrying out other duties, and the marking of tyres is over and above those. We do not have specific costs for marking tyres, but we could try to identify those. At a certain time of year, he does a lot of work relating to bonfires, but, during the rest of the year, he works on various other issues, such as fly-posting, graffiti and dogs. He is not employed specifically to deal with tyres.

The Chairperson:

For the few months from April onwards, does he work full-time marking tyres?

Mrs McCall:

Even then, it is not full-time. We are fortunate that the individual is so dedicated. He fits in that work around everything else, and the fact that everyone at the tyre depots is so co-operative makes life easier. It is down to the individual and the relationships that we have with the depots.

The Chairperson:

Sorry for jumping in, Patsy.

Mr McGlone:

That is OK, Chair. I just want to get how that works clear in my head. Does the warden mark the tyres, or does the company do that?

Mrs Sargent:

He marks the tyres.

Mr McGlone:

That is an awful lot of tyres to mark, mind you. I am thinking about the time involved. He could

not get many of those big lorry or tractor tyres done in an hour.

Mrs Sargent:

Although he physically marks the tyres, staff at the depot assist him by lifting out tyres, setting them aside, and so on. He spends more time on the first visit to a depot, but, as the monitoring visits continue, fewer tyres require marking each week.

Mr McGlone:

I want to get a wee handle on that. Why is that the case? We have heard that tyres are constantly leaving depots. If your guy is marking them and tyres are still being removed from vehicles, the number requiring marking should not reduce much. The number should be static on each occasion.

Mrs Sargent:

A certain number of waste tyres are stored in depots.

Mrs McCall:

They bulk them prior to collection, and you mark that bulk when you first go. You then have to do only what is done each week before they are taken away. The bulk is done on the first visit, and then it tails off a little.

Mr McGlone:

OK, thank you.

The Chairperson:

We went to two recycling plants recently and looked at the different end products that came from used tyres. They were turned into bales for landfill or roads or into crumbs for playgrounds and so forth. The tyre markings that are used are quite bright and bold. Do you have any evidence that could jeopardise the possibility of their being used for different products?

Mrs Sargent:

No. We have a tyre recycling business in our borough, and I know that our borough warden has a good relationship with that premises. To date, they have never expressed any concerns about the

marking of tyres or whether that would have any detrimental effect on recycling.

Mr Kinahan:

I am, as ever, impressed by Ballymena Borough Council, which leads on many things, including gritting and other matters. I am very impressed with your pilot project. Has there been any chance of putting it through NILGA? Perhaps that is the route we should be looking at, given that councils are all quite independent from us up here. If all councils, through NILGA, were to get together and adopt your pilot project, and if, dare I say it, a few tweaks were needed, that may be a way to deal with tyres.

As a landowner, I take Willie's point. However, I am very aware, and it needs to be said, that the Housing Executive, certainly in Antrim and, I think, in Ballymena, is the leader in how we deal with bonfires. We will have to tiptoe through that. Finally, who do you think is best placed to enforce the scheme? Is it the NIEA, or should we be looking in different directions, either to us here or to a combination of us, you and the police? Thank you for a great presentation.

Mrs McCall:

We have not specifically taken this matter to NILGA, but we have given presentations on the scheme at best practice events that other councils attended. I do not know whether any other council has picked up the scheme. I am not aware of that, but we have not taken it specifically to NILGA.

There is not much that we can say about the landowner issue, but perhaps Alderman Cherry would say that there are occasions when, with the best will in the world, landowners — farmers in particular — can suddenly find stuff dumped on their land that they have not put there. Perhaps that also needs to be borne in mind. As to who is best placed to enforce the scheme, I do not think that any one agency can do it on their own. The problem has to be tackled through a collaborative effort.

Mr Kinahan:

Thanks very much.

Mr Dallat:

Thanks for the presentation. It was very enlightening. Since we were reminded this week that this is a legislative Assembly, what legislation would you like to see put in place that would make your job a lot easier?

Mrs Sargent:

As Nicola said, and as we outlined in the paper, a good starting point would be for the existing legislation to be maximised and utilised along with a proactive approach in a scheme that is similar to ours. The NIEA worked on a joint operation with us in 2006, and the fact that both organisations were visible on the ground sent out a very clear message to all our tyre depots. The fact that NIEA took one prosecution and issued warnings to two other businesses demonstrates that the existing legislation can be used.

Mr Dallat:

Basically, are you saying that the existing legislation, perhaps with the addition of microchipping tyres or something like that, would make it easier? That is fine; thanks.

Mr Molloy:

Thanks, deputy mayor and staff. It is a welcome sight to see elected members here today. Ballymena's initiative is good, and it should be commended. I have just noticed the photographs in your submission, which have been taken outside the yard. Is that right? Have the tyres that we see in the photographs been collected already?

Mrs Sargent:

They were at the depots when we went there.

Mr Molloy:

If we are thinking about how councils can afford to pay for the scheme, have you found any benefit in being able to claim for paying for the work out of landfill tax? Is that one means of doing that, or is there another mechanism that would mean that the tyre depots, after a period, would take on this particular job themselves and mark the tyres? The fact that they are clearly marked means that they can be seen if they are on a bonfire or anywhere else. That is a good

initiative. A chip would be grand, but you cannot see it, and it is not public. There is the issue of respectability for the businesses involved; they do not want to see their name on bonfires. If the like of landfill tax could be used in this way, that would put resources back into the industry.

Mrs McCall:

It is an interesting idea. We have not really previously considered how it is paid for, because we do it on such a small scale that we have not really thought any further than that.

Mr Dornan:

It is something that we will certainly consider looking into.

Mr Molloy:

Perhaps the depots could do it themselves.

Mrs Sargent:

Some depots have expressed a wish to assist. We would also still need to have a strong monitoring role, but that is being considered.

Ms P Bradley:

Thank you for your presentation. I was not in for a lot of it, but I was watching it from outside. Congratulations, again. I know that councils are having to become more creative and that they end up having to do more and more jobs that are above and beyond what they probably should be doing, so well done.

I know that councils are looking at budgets at this time of the year. They are looking at striking the rate, and we need to remember that, ultimately, councils are the custodians of the public purse through the money that they spend. How sustainable is it for you, as a council, to continue to do this work? It will probably increase as time goes on unless some sort of legislation is passed down as to what we should be doing with our used tyre disposal. How sustainable is this for Ballymena Borough Council?

Mr Dornan:

At the minute, it is sustainable, but we do not have the resources to cover it if its use increases. Not being an environmental health expert myself, I think that the NIEA needs to step up to the plate on this issue and help to monitor the situation. It has claimed resource issues and that it has no staff to deal with this, but it is its legislative duty to do it. It has to step up to the plate.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much. That is useful information for us to consider in our inquiry. Thank you for coming, and I especially thank you, deputy mayor.

Members, I have been told that a mobile phone is still switched on and causing interference. Can everybody check that their phones are switched off, please? Mobile phones interfere with our recording.

We are joined by Diane Roberts and Brendan Carragher. Thank you very much for coming to help us with the inquiry. You can give us a presentation lasting around 10 minutes, after which members can ask questions.

Mr Brendan Carragher (Newline Waste Solutions):

I am Brendan Carragher, chief executive officer of Newline Waste Solutions. I am accompanied by Diane Roberts, chief executive officer of our partners. We would like to thank the Chairperson for giving us the opportunity to talk to the Committee.

As we know, waste tyres are a huge problem. That problem will not go away unless there is investment of finances and resources. The UK alone produces 450,000 tons of waste tyres. A recent BBC report stated that Northern Ireland produces 1.7 million waste tyres. I believe that figure to be heavily underestimated; I think that, in reflection of the current economic crisis, it is almost twice that amount. From being in the tyre trade, I know that more people are buying part-worn tyres than ever before. In our business, that accounts for almost 90% of trade.

Part-worn tyres usually have 50% tread remaining on them. They cost around £20, which is a fraction of the cost of a new tyre. The increasing demand for part-worn tyres contributes

considerably to the problem of waste tyres. If the average customer changes their tyres every 12 months, they will now do so every six months. That basically doubles the number of waste tyres that are produced in Northern Ireland. Waste tyres come in from Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and from other countries across Europe. Basically, those countries are reducing their waste while ours increases.

I have worked in the tyre trade since I was 13 years old. When I was 16 years old, I set up a limited company called Carragher Tyre Sales. We now retail and trade throughout the UK and Ireland. Therefore, I have insight of and information on the problem of waste tyres throughout the entire industry.

As the Committee is well aware, tyre collection is a shady business. Basically, a customer goes into a tyre retail depot to purchase tyres. The retailer charges the customer £1.50 to £2 for disposal of their waste tyres. Then the waste tyres collector comes along. He usually charges the tyre depot between 50p and £1 a tyre to dispose of the waste. At those prices, there is no way that those tyres will ever end up in a proper recycling facility. It is more likely that they will be fly-tipped, stockpiled, buried or burned.

Authorised recycling facilities companies such as mine charge £70 to £150 a ton to dispose of waste tyres. However, the problem is that the products that they create are not high value. They create crumb rubber that is used for such things as playgrounds, horse bedding, arenas and garden centres. There is no demand for those products; nobody wants them. Therefore, recycling facilities are stockpiling tyres. I know of a recycling facility that has a stockpile of over 400,000 tyres. It cannot accept our waste. Every time that we ring to ask whether it can take our tyres, we are told to leave it until the following week. In that situation, tyre retailers are stockpiling. It is not as though we want to stockpile; we have no other choice. Those tyres create a hazard and take up space in our businesses. At the moment, stockpiles are being set alight, and I think that there was such an incident in Derry last year. That fire caused considerable damage and expense to the taxpayer and the human environment.

Our solution to the problem is pyrolysis. Pyrolysis technology breaks the tyre down into three high-value products: oil, steel and carbon black. It also creates synergy gas. We reuse the

synergy gas to run our system. There is no waste after that process is complete. On a recent trip to Taiwan, I saw a system that recycles around 30 tons of waste tyres a day. It produces 14 tons of oil, 10 tons of carbon black, 4.5 tons of steel and 1.5 tons of gas. The pyro oil that it produces is a grade 2 oil that is similar to kerosene and red diesel, which can be used in industrial heating. It can also be used to run boats. So, there is a list of applications for the pyro oil.

The carbon black produced in this system is called diesel carbon black. It has been tested by Goodyear and Michelin, and it can be reused in the manufacture of new tyres. There is a demand for carbon black of nine million tons a year. The carbon black produced in the system has an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification; therefore, it meets the highest specification. Producing virgin carbon black takes 10 times more carbon energy than air-eco carbon black. Therefore, when it leaves our system it is liable for carbon credits. The steel produced will be sold to metal recyclers, and we have customers in place for all the by-products.

The pyrolysis system that we plan to introduce to Northern Ireland meets all EU requirements. Cyprus's system, which has EU backing, recycles 8,000 tons a year. The system that we propose will recycle 11,000 tons, and it will make Northern Ireland one of the largest tyre recyclers in Europe.

My team has a wealth of knowledge of the waste tyre industry. Diane Roberts specialises in mark-up strategies and start-up businesses, and Oonagh Toner has 20 years' experience in the waste industry, which was gained from working with Veolia Waste, the world's leading company.

We have fully researched and clearly outlined a business plan to bring to the investment community. Our project would involve a big investment in plant, machinery and jobs. We know that we can solve the waste tyre problem. The facility would make it more economical for tyre retailers to recycle their waste with us, as we will charge only 50p a tyre. It would not be viable for them to do anything else with their waste.

Having government support on the supply of waste tyres will make the business economical. It will also allow the business to be more regulated. Our facility will be able to issue certificates

to tyre retailers when they dispose of their waste with us. At the start, the business will create 30 new jobs at a time when jobs are needed. We estimate that we can export 3.8 million high-value products in the first year alone. The opportunity is here for us as a business, and for the Committee and the Government, to put Northern Ireland on the map as the leading recycler of tyres in Europe. Thank you.

Ms Diane Roberts (Newline Waste Solutions):

One of the things that attracted us to the project is that it is an innovative idea, it is in the green sector and it has the potential to grow and to produce exports. It is an opportunity for us to go out and seek private sector investment to solve a public problem in a fairly lucrative way. We want to give Northern Ireland an opportunity to support the private sector and to develop jobs and exports, as well as to solve the problem for the public sector.

The Chairperson:

The industry certainly needs encouragement and backup if the issue of illegal dumping and the trend for fly-tipping are to be addressed. Thank you very much. It is an innovative concept and project.

Mr Molloy:

Thank you for your presentation. It certainly seems to be a new idea. What are the side effects of pyrolysis, and how is pollution controlled in the system? What do you need from the Assembly to ensure that people have to dispose of their tyres through such a system?

Mr Carragher:

The system will not affect current tyre recyclers in Northern Ireland. The products that they create, such as crumb rubber, do not make a profit. Their profit is made from collecting the tyres. Their crumb will go to our facility, and we will recycle it. There will be no pollution when all the processes in the system are complete. There will be a few emissions, but they will be below those specified in EU regulations.

Mr W Clarke:

I welcome the proposal. With regard to government finance, is Invest NI in discussion with you

about developing the project?

Mr Carragher:

I am with Invest NI on a Propel programme. One hundred businesses applied at the start of the process, and our business was among the final 15 that were picked. Therefore, Invest NI is working with us on the project.

Ms Roberts:

We have had help from the technical team from Invest NI, which comprises people who understand very well the technology that is involved. This technology has come a long way in the past five years. The first pyrolysis machines had a number of drawbacks, some of which were on the environmental side. We have been working with Invest NI's technical department, which helped to source the information we needed when we went out to Taiwan, for example. This is a project that, if it gets legs, Invest NI would be very happy to support.

Mr W Clarke:

Have you viewed the pyrolysis system in operation in Asia?

Mr Carragher:

I have, yes.

Mr Kinahan:

Thank you for your presentation. This may sound a little thick, but what exactly happens in pyrolysis? Is it a form of burning?

Mr Carragher:

It is not a form of burning. Tyres are put into a reactor, which heats to 400 degrees. That breaks the tyre down into the four by-products, and it is oxygen free, so it does not cause burning.

Mr Kinahan:

Thank you and good luck.

Mr Molloy:

It has been proposed that the system be used for other waste products. Do you have any ideas about how to do that? We were discussing MBT plants that have been built throughout the North. Would your system also be able to deal with other waste, such as household waste?

Mr Carragher:

You can add on another part of the system that will recycle plastic using the same method. There is an awful lot of oil in plastic. It is the same as a tyre: nearly 50% of car tyre is oil. The system can be used to recycle the likes of plastic bags.

The Chairperson:

You mentioned turning the tyres into crumbs, which has a limited use and market. Where do you intend your end products to go?

Mr Carragher:

We have customers for all our end products. The company that visited and that makes this system is willing to buy our carbon black, but they would be looking to buy it at a discounted price. There is demand for nine million tons of carbon black a year, and a lot of tyre companies now want to buy eco carbon black, because it is seen as helping the environment and is good advertising for their own businesses. The oil could be sold to the likes of electricity production plants to run their systems. It can also be refined and used as a diesel fuel. The steel, which is high-grade steel, will be sold on to metal recyclers.

Ms Roberts:

One of the things that we have been taking into account is that the material is all reusable and is seen as green. There is obviously a trade in carbon credits, so there is a benefit from that as well. That makes the project infinitely more sustainable.

The Chairperson:

Thanks very much for your input into the inquiry, and best of luck.

