Leeds businessman receives record jail sentence over £2.2m recycling fraud

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A Leeds waste operator has been jailed for seven years and six months for defrauding the electrical waste recycling industry out of £2.2million.

Terence Solomon Dugbo, 45, of High Ash Avenue, Leeds, was sentenced on Friday 15 July at Leeds Crown Court following a major Environment Agency investigation and seven-week trial. This is a record sentence for an environmental crime.

Investigating officers discovered that Dugbo had falsified paperwork to illegitimately claim that his Leeds-based firm TLC Recycling Ltd had collected and recycled more than 19,500 tonnes of household electrical waste during 2011. In reality, Dugbo's company had never handled the amounts of waste described, and he was not entitled to the substantial recycling fees he was paid.

During the trial, Sailesh Mehta and Howard McCann, prosecuting for the Environment Agency, told the court that the defendant received the money through government-backed Producer Compliance Schemes – organisations that pay for the recycling of old electrical goods to offset the production of new equipment.

Seized documents showed that Dugbo's company was claiming money for waste collections from streets and properties that did not exist. Vehicles used to transfer waste were recorded as being in Northern Ireland, England, and Scotland on the same day. Some vehicles did not exist at all, and some documents showed vast weights of waste being collected by vehicles that could not carry such loads: for example, a moped was said to have carried waste 42 times, and one one trip it was said to have carried 991 TVs and 413 fridges between Dugbo's businesses. Weights of individual items said to have been collected were also exaggerated: fax machines were logged as weighing 47kg, and drills 80kg.

TLC's paperwork showed that the waste was taken to another firm for supposed treatment – the Leeds Reuse Centre, this being another business run by Dugbo at about the same time as TLC.

Dugbo has previous convictions for fraud and illegally exporting banned hazardous waste to Nigeria. He had denied the charges in this latest case – conspiracy to defraud, acting as a company director while disqualified, and breaching an environmental permitting condition – but he was found guilty on all counts.

Dugbo had been disqualified from acting as a company director until November 2017 due to the bad debts of a previous company. His involvement in TLC Recycling, which has since gone into liquidation, was in breach of this disqualification. Dugbo also breached environmental laws by treating CFC gas cylinders on the TLC site, even though the permit did not allow the treatment of waste containing ozone-depleting substances.

Dr Paul Salter, senior environmental crime officer at the Environment Agency, said after the hearing:

> Terry Dugbo's illegal activities defrauded legitimate recycling schemes out of significant amounts of money. He masterminded and fabricated a flow of false paperwork that claimed his business was collecting and recycling vast amounts of waste electrical goods when in fact he wasn't.
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> This prosecution has been the result of a significant, co-ordinated investigation involving operational, enforcement and legal officers in the Environment Agency, and with help from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.
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> The length of the sentence handed out by the court today demonstrates the seriousness of Dugbo's activities. Hopefully this case and the record sentence will act as a warning to others who commit waste crime that they will be pursued and, if convicted, could face serious punishment.

In sentencing, Judge Clarke described the fraud as a "sophisticated" crime from a company that was designed to conceal its intentions from everybody involved.

He commended the Environment Agency for its conduct of the case, formerly thanking Dr Salter for his investigatory work and contribution to the legal proceedings.

Judge Clarke said:

> What I found really amazing was the amount and complexity of the false paperwork. The scale of the investigation here was enormous. It took Dr Salter and his team nearly a year to go through the documents they seized in the search of the premises.

Judge Clarke also disqualified Dugbo from acting as a company director for 12 years, stating that he was “a risk to the public”, and he initiated the Environment Agency’s request to begin Proceeds of Crime against Dugbo for £2.2million.

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