

Gull proof sacks – a waste of time?




In certain areas of the city steps have been taken to defy the wily gulls who for so long attacked our black bin bags and ensured that rubbish was strewn across the streets.

Then in 2011 the council decided to introduce the gull proof sack. There are all sorts of rules about using them. You must place your rubbish in a black plastic bag inside the gull proof sack. You must put the rubbish out on a certain day at a certain time, not a minute before, otherwise you may be fined.

So this would signal the end of the problem? Well it might if the bags were not just used in a certain way, but also emptied in a certain way. What the council appear to do is send a squad on foot ahead of the refuse truck. They empty the black bags out of the gull proof sacks and then make a heap of these at intervals along the street. This makes it easier for the refuse truck which presumably has to make fewer stops on its journey.

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It might seem that to send an advance party like this is a great idea. But the problem is that they are sent along the streets some three hours in advance of the collection time, meaning that for a substantial part of the evening the rubbish lies on the street. This is not much of a problem at the moment as the gulls have not quite arrived here in any number, but we shudder to think what mess could result in the summer.

 Councillor Adam McVey who is Vice-Convener of Transport and Environment explained to The Edinburgh Reporter:-“This is

an operational issue which we're still trying to solve. The system should work by residents being asked to place their landfill waste in black bags or similar large bags such as swing bin liners, then place them in the gull proof bags for presentation at the kerbside. The crews should then empty each gull proof bag and manually lift the contents to the lorry.

"Crews are not allowed to stockpile bags and come back for them later as this will leave the bin bags vulnerable to gull attack. I have spoken to officers who are going to issue the crews with a written instruction tonight regarding this issue instructing that they do not do it under any circumstances.

If anyone experiences problems with this on their street they should get in touch and I'll ensure any problems are dealt with." Councillor McVey's contact details are on the council website [here](#).

It was way back in November 2011 that a council report explained why it is essential that plastic bags are no longer used:-

"The project team kept a visual record of the impact of the waste collection methods on street cleanliness before and during the pilots. Before the pilots commenced street cleanliness in all areas of city centre suffered an adverse impact on black bag collection days. Previously black bags were collected twice a week, mostly in the morning. Most householders would present their black bags at the kerbside the evening before or early in the morning on the day of collection. The longer that bags are left out on the street the higher the likelihood of them being attacked by gulls and other animals.

"This likelihood increases significantly during the spring and summer. The extended daylight hours and the increased foraging for food by gulls during their nesting season leads to a high incidence of burst bags. By the time bags are

collected many will have been burst with and their contents scattered across the pavement. There were also incidents of waste being mis-presented by some households and left out on the street for two or three days.

*“In those areas that participated in a containerisation or gull proof bag pilot there was a significantly reduced incidence of waste spilling on to the street and in most areas there was no incidence of refuse derived street litter.
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