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Wheelie bin gets high tech makeover

RFID tags fitted to rubbish bin to calculate household waste

by Stuart Miles published on 28 August 2006

The humble wheelie bin has secretly had a high tech makeover to monitor the amount of waste thrown away by households. Councils have already secretly wheeled out 500,000 spy bins across England to gather data on rubbish habits, but experts are warning that the bins, which are capable of transmitting information back to a central database could be used to fine those who exceed limits on the amount of non-recyclable rubbish that they put out. The device, which is slightly bigger than a one-pence piece is screwed into a plastic recess in the lip of the wheelie bin. As the bin is lifted up for emptying by council workers, a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) sensor on the refuse truck scans the chip, which carries a serial number assigned to each property in the street. The RFID tag stores information about the bin's address and the weight of the rubbish in the bin. Once loaded onto the back of the Dustbin truck, it is weighed, and then records the weight of the contents on an electronic data card. Once the truck returns to the depot, all information collected is downloaded onto a central computer. It is thought that the plan would pave the way for charging households for the amount of waste that has been collected from them, in an attempt to promote recycling. The chip itself costs around £2 to make but the cost of fitting the equipment to a council dustcart is around £15,000.

