

On the beat at Glastonbury

Since 1976 Glastonbury's Green Police force has been encouraging festival-goers to pick up their litter, recycle – and urinate in the toilets. Andrea Height joins the force to find out more about its work

Pre-Glastonbury training Sunday, May 27

With Glastonbury about four weeks away, I attend one of the last few Green Police training sessions. It's a drizzly Sunday morning in Kingston in west London where we meet chief Green Police organiser Bernadette Vallely. She tells us about the issues we'll be tackling: litter prevention, recycling and stopping people peeing all over the farm.

She also runs through the dos and don'ts, which include not smoking or drinking alcohol while in uniform and on duty. Bernadette explains this is because you become something of a mini-celebrity, with festival-goers and the media taking your photo all the time, even when you don't realise. And they want to ensure the Green Police are portrayed in a positive light.

The Green Police force is effectively part of the festival, and has something of a dual role: 'green enforcement' and performance. So the dos include using humour and even flirting to get the eco messages across to people. This year Bernadette wants the Green Police to crack down on people dropping their cigarette butts all over the farm. Why? Because each one has to be picked up after the festival, they take about 12-14 years to biodegrade, and the toxic butts aren't very good for the soil. She circulates some cigarette litter facts so that we are armed with knowledge. The idea is to get talking to festival-goers – if you explain why it's a problem people are more likely to alter their behaviour.

The festival Arriving – Thursday, June 21

The steward in the car park suggests we put our wellies on as it's already muddy on site! I trek up to the special Green Police camping area, where the team have to camp together to help them bond. Some of my fellow officers have been here since Tuesday and have already been out and about on patrol. Tonight there's a Pimms party in the big Green Police marquee in our camping area – a bit of a get-to-know-each-other before the first proper day of the festival.

Day 1 – Friday, June 22

We sign in with either Howard (Bernadette's Green Police assistant) or Bernadette herself to be ticked off the list and allocated a number, a green high-visibility jacket, a whistle and an official Green



Talking to people is the best way to encourage a change in behaviour

Police ID card. Volunteering entitles you to a ticket to the festival and two meals a day. In return, you attend a two-hour meeting each morning and work at least six hours a day. To ensure people don't abuse the system by getting free entry to the festival and bunking off, you have to pay the full ticket price as a deposit, returned later if you've pulled your weight.

In the meeting we go over the dos and don'ts, what is expected of us, and hear from veteran Green Police men and women about how to do a good job. When we catch punters peeing in the hedges or streams, we are advised to ask them to stop and explain that they are

Happy butt-bin converts



polluting the water table. Blowing whistles and surrounding offenders is a shaming tactic often used. A few years ago thousands of fish were killed as the toxicity levels of the streams rocketed, so now the Environment Agency periodically measures levels throughout the event.

We're advised to get punters to pee into empty beer or cider cups and then carry them to the compost bins and drop the whole lot in – the cups are compostable. Apparently male urine is particularly good for compost.

Split into teams of five to 10, we put on our costumes and head out on patrol. But the heavy rain forces us to take cover en-route. We duck inside one of the tent bars for shelter and find a band of smokers who we can target in our anti-butt dropping campaign. The

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Green Police leaders rescued old film canisters that were heading for landfill from a film developing company, and we offer these to punters as a handy solution to keep their cigarette butts in while they are out and about at the festival – an alternative to dropping them in the mud.

Most people react positively to being approached by people in funny green helmets and costumes. Appealing to people's better nature seems to work – they see that picking up each cigarette butt dropped at the site would be hard work and many are shocked to find out how long they take to decompose. "It's really good that you are actually offering a solution," one punter says, as he shows how he will continue to use his new 'butt bin' in front of us. Ah, a convert!

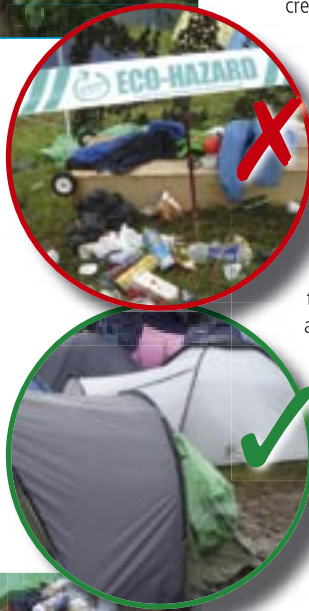


Day 2 – Saturday, June 23

Our morning meeting involves the groups reporting back and sharing useful tips and litter and peeing hotspots. Feedback from the Green Police old-timers is that the festival is looking cleaner and tidier than it has done in previous years. "If we do the job properly then it will make future jobs easier and easier," says Bernadette.

Out on patrol I notice that many people are giving the Green Police a warm reception. Many chirp "it's the Green Police!" as we walk by, and they come up and say hello and ask exactly what we do. Some tell you all about how they have been telling their friends off for littering and not recycling, which is exactly what we want – getting people to police themselves.

Today we weave through the crowds in front of Glastonbury's main Pyramid stage and get them to put their



By the end of the festival recycling facilities are taking on a well-used appearance

litter into our plastic sacks. The group attempts to have one bag for recyclables and another for other waste, but this proves difficult because of the sheer number of people who want to get rid of their rubbish. Most are appreciative of us. "You're doing a great job," they say, as we go by. But there's an awful lot of litter that has been dropped in the mud in front of the stage.

Day 3 – Sunday, June 24

It's the last proper day of the festival and the final team meeting. "This is the cleanest Glastonbury I've ever seen," says Bernadette. "I think we've reached a critical mass." With around 170 people, the force is the biggest ever and seems to be achieving results.

"Talking one-to-one to people has made the difference. And I think it helped that we were on the front page of the *Q Daily* [the festival newspaper] on Friday," she says. Various members of the Green Police have been stopped on duty for photo shoots, TV and radio interviews – all of which have helped spread the word.

But there has been feedback from the collection crews that the compost bins are leaking and are difficult to empty because there is so much urine in them. It seems that the punters have really embraced the pee-in-compost-bin method. We are told to change tack and tell people to empty urine-filled cups into the toilets. It shows that people are listening though.

Later on, when we speak to some punters about dropping cigarette butts, they say they spoke to some Green Police on their first day, have been using their butt bins, and told all their friends not to drop their cigarette butts as well – result! Some smokers even come up to us and request butt bins.

Today, my group's patrol involves going around the campsites and doing litter checks. We have biodegradable 'Eco Hazard' Green Police tape, which we use to cordon off particularly 'bad' campsites – to help highlight litter-strewn areas and show that the Green Police have visited. If the campers are there, we talk to them and encourage them to recycle and not leave litter.

Some are more co-operative than others. Other campsites, however, are an excellent example of 'away from home' recycling, with green recycling sacks attached to the side of tents, filled with their empty bottles and cans – impressive.

Going home – Monday, June 25

As I head off the farm, the site looks a state. It's been an awful year for rain, so the conditions have been challenging to work in. It has been tiring and hard work, but also fun. I've seen that some people will do their bit while others will take more convincing. But the highly visual and fun Green Police force acts as an eco reminder for people and its work seems to be raising awareness and having a real effect.