



Spy chips hidden in 2.5 MILLION dustbins: 60pc rise in electronic bugs as council snoopers plan pay-as-you-throw tax

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The growing threat of a stealth tax on the rubbish we throw away was exposed by startling figures yesterday.

More than 2.5million homes now have wheelie bins fitted with microchips to weigh their contents.

This is an increase of nearly two-thirds in just a year. The bins, which can be electronically identified and weighed, are designed for 'pay-as-you-throw' rubbish tax schemes.



© Daily Mail

Stealth tax: 2,629,052 homes have now been given bins with chips

Under such schemes - which are likely to be hugely unpopular - families who put out more waste will pay higher taxes to their local council.

Disclosure of the rapid spread of chipped bins followed the announcement this week of the first council to bring in a bin tax. Bristol City is presenting its scheme as a reward for recyclers, with cash payments to homes that leave out less rubbish.

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The spread of chipped bins marks the revival of a tax idea that the Government appeared to have abandoned last year.

Gordon Brown promised to ditch bin taxes in the spring of 2008, at a point when the unpopularity among voters of fortnightly collections, strict bin rules, and the threat of pay-as-you-throw was at its height.

In January last year, ministers acknowledged that not one council had applied to test pay-as-you-throw schemes.

But yesterday, research by the Big Brother Watch campaign group showed that the use of chipped bins has quietly spread over the past year.

In March 2009, a survey based on Freedom of Information inquiries showed there were 42 councils which used bins with microchips. But the latest check, also based on FOI requests, put the number of authorities with electronic bins at 68 - one in five of all those that collect household rubbish.

According to the responses from town halls, 2,629,052 homes have now been given bins with chips.

Alex Deane of Big Brother Watch, said: 'The number of local councils placing microchips in bins is increasing, despite the fact that only one of them has volunteered to trial the Government's pay-as-you-throw scheme.

'Councils are waiting until the public aren't watching to begin surveillance on our waste habits, intruding into people's private lives and introducing punitive taxes on what we throw away. The British public doesn't want this technology, these fines, or this intrusion.

'If local authorities have no intention to monitor our waste then they should end the surreptitious installation of these bin microchips.'

The campaign group complained that the bins allow councils to examine household rubbish and sell the information to commercial concerns as well as to impose taxes.

It also warned that collection of data from chipped bins could show when households were on holiday, opening the way to abuse by criminals.

The Local Government Association said that microchips were only put in bins to improve services to the public, for example by helping the elderly.

A spokesman said: 'Microchips simply identify the house to which a bin belongs, they do not mean councils can analyse what people are throwing away or issue fines.

'Putting microchips in people's bins can allow councils to provide people with a better service that costs less.

'If an elderly resident needs help getting their bin collected and returned, a microchip quickly flags it up to the refuse collector, saving time and money.'

However, using a microchip to identify a bin means that technology on a dustcart can then weigh it and the information can be used to prepare a tax bill.

Tories said they believed there were even more than 2.6million homes equipped with microchipped bins, numbers of which have been notoriously hard to track in recent years.

Tory local government spokesman Caroline Spelman said: 'Labour Ministers are secretly planning to roll out bin taxes across the country after the election if Gordon Brown can cling to power.

'The Government have already forced through bin tax laws and have been funding the bin technology to collect the taxes.'

A spokesman for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said: 'There are no Government plans to introduce microchips in bins.

'Any use of microchips is a local authority decision - some councils use them to monitor levels of waste. This is not about spying on people or fining them.'

However, in 2008 nearly 100 councils ran investigations into the contents of their residents' bins, in some cases to check on what rubbish they dump and in others to try to obtain information on their incomes and lifestyles.



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