

FINES TO ENABLE PROPER PARKING IN DUBLIN

A multi-agency initiative, which has been targeting the unauthorised use of disabled parking bays, has been an unqualified success with over 400 fixed charge notices issued to date for parking offences in Dublin since last February. Gardaí are now in talks with the European Traffic Police Network to roll out a pan-European targeted day of enforcement. Report by Olivia Kelleher.

In a recent posting on Twitter Gardaí said they had caught a driver who was illegally using his mother in law's disabled parking permit in order to park his car in a prime spot, to do some Christmas shopping.

The motorist was stopped in Drury Street in the south city centre of Dublin and is now facing a fine of up to €3,000 and/or six months in prison.

Sgt Peter Woods of the Dublin Metropolitan Region's Traffic Division at Dublin Castle, who is spearheading the new programme, says they have caught people using permits issued to dead family members. Other people use one permit for multiple cars.

"We came across someone recently who had the permit deliberately stuffed down the end of the windscreen so you couldn't see the expiry date. We waited for the motorist to come back to the car,



Sgt Peter Woods from Dublin Metropolitan Region's Traffic Division at Dublin Castle, is pictured with Niall McDonnell from the Irish Wheelchair Association in Clane, Co. Kildare, and Louise Bruton, who runs a blog called 'Legless in Dublin' and also writes for The Irish Times.



The scheme has been so successful that Gardaí are in talks with the European Traffic Police Network to roll out a pan-European targeted day of enforcement.

only to find that the permit had expired in 2015 and it was for the father-in-law of the woman who was in a nursing home in Drogheda. The man had been in a nursing home in Drogheda but had been dead for six months."

The scheme has been so successful that Sgt Woods says that Gardaí are in talks with the European Traffic Police Network to roll out a pan European targeted day of enforcement.

The success of 'Operation Enable' – a multi-agency initiative which has been targeting the unauthorised use of disabled parking bays and disabled parking permits on Dublin's streets to enable legitimate permit holders to use these facilities, free from obstruction – has seen it replicated in other areas around the country, with similar results.

AGENCY COLLABORATION

'Operation Enable' is a collaboration between An Garda Síochána Dublin City Council, Dublin Street Parking Services and the two associations responsible for issuing disabled persons

OPERATION ENABLE



Sgt Peter Woods, DMR Traffic Division at Dublin Castle, is pictured with Richard Ryder, from the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland, and Louise Bruton, freelance journalist and blogger of 'Legless in Dublin'.

parking permits – the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Disabled Drivers' Association of Ireland.

Sgt Woods says that the idea for the scheme arose from a conversation he had last Christmas with a disabled motorist. "He was telling me about the difficulties he experienced on a daily basis finding accessible parking in Dublin City Centre and also about the ongoing misuse of the blue badges.

"Following on from that, I met with the other agencies mentioned and it was agreed to launch a targeted enforcement operation to tackle the problem."

Sgt Woods says the operation has been documented on their @GardaTraffic Twitter page and has met with an overwhelmingly positive response, resulting in coverage in online and mainstream media. It has also been featured on RTE's 'Crimecall' programme.

CATCHING THE FRAUDSTERS

He points out that some people "selfishly use permits with the deliberate intention of acting fraudulently". However, he stresses that many people are just wilfully ignorant and think that if the permit is in the house it is for the use of all the family.



Sgt Peter Woods was presented with the Special Recognition Award for 'Operation Enable' by Liz O'Donnell, chairperson of the Road Safety Authority at the RSA Leading Lights Awards on 13 December in Croke Park.

"I have had people say to me that they used the permit to get stuff at the chemist for the permit holder. But what they don't realise is that it is only to be used when the person is in the car. I have been working in the city centre for 25 years. Nothing really surprises me (when it comes to parking)."

Sgt Woods says it is great people are now writing to the Traffic Department to report incidents of misuse. "There is higher detection on social media. I had someone ring me to say that he 'wanted to speak to the Garda who was in the paper' in order to tell me about his neighbour's misuse of his permit.

" We have seized 47 permits in Dublin alone. It's a huge success and is being replicated around the country, in cities such as Cork, Limerick and Galway. Most recently it was also rolled out in Tralee in early December."

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