

Hidden depths

Willich in Germany has installed underground bins to help keep its town centre clean, writes **MANFRED REINING**

Waste collection in town centres can be a costly and time-consuming enterprise. While refuse collectors attempt to keep towns clean, their job is made more difficult if litter bins are overfilled and refuse is found lying around them rather than inside. Untidy and dirty areas in the town make a shoddy impression.

Willich, in Germany, has some 600-litre bins that need to be emptied at regular intervals, some on a daily basis, while others just once a week. One of the tasks in the recent 'clean up Willich' campaign was to optimize refuse collection, and the project team responsible heard about another German town where underground litter bins had been installed. Gerd Neiser, waste consultant for Willich, says 'this idea appealed to us immediately'.

Reports about the underground litter bins in the other town, Grefrath, were positive, and so it was decided to put theory into practice without further ado. To date, 27 'GeoTainer®' GTM underground litter bins have been ordered from manufacturer Bauer GmbH (of Südlohn) and installed at strategic locations in and around the vicinity of Willich.

THE PRODUCT

The basic idea is absolutely convincing albeit simple. The actual container, which has a volume of 600 litres, is 'buried' underground. Only the throw-in column is visible above ground level. The throw-in column is custom-designed to offer an appearance in keeping with that of the surrounding area. It is available in different finishes and materials such as powder-coated steel or stainless steel. The cover helps protect the unit from rain. The column itself can easily be removed, and the opening covered by a plate – a useful feature during events such as fairs or processions when the column could be an obstacle. An ashtray is offered as an optional extra.

INSTALLATION, EMPTYING

Some factors were important for the choice of location. It should be central and 'busy' in terms of pedestrians, so places such as bus stops were considered. The installation of the underground bin itself is not difficult – of course, local peculiarities such as tree roots must be observed, but as the ground work only has to be dealt with once, any problems of this nature can easily be overcome.

'Oh, how clever'. The passer-by was right: the way the GTM is emptied is clever. The throw-in column can be opened using a special key and tilted to reveal a large opening. The suction pipe from the sweeper is inserted and the container vacuum emptied – one person can empty a 600-litre bin in seconds. Suction is facilitated by the centrally positioned suction shaft and by the 45° incline in the floor of the underground container. Once the GTM is emptied, the throw-in column is returned to an upright position and the lock engages. All standard sweepers can be used for emptying – even the small sweepers with a tight turning circle often used in pedestrian areas.

ADVANTAGES

Even the most used bins now require less frequent emptying – some only once a month instead of daily. This means a considerable saving, important in these days of tight budgets. Of course, the costs of the unit itself and for the ground work have to be compared with the saving, but these occur only once and payback periods are short.

The underground system offers other positive side-effects. As it is cooler underground, even on hot days there are no nasty smells or problems with insects attracted by food waste, its packaging, or sticky drink cartons. And the fact that the rubbish literally disappears from the field of vision certainly makes this unit even more attractive. No waste separation is possible, but as Gerd Neiser points out, 'that's also true of the common litter bin'. And if vandalism occurs, only the column needs to be replaced.

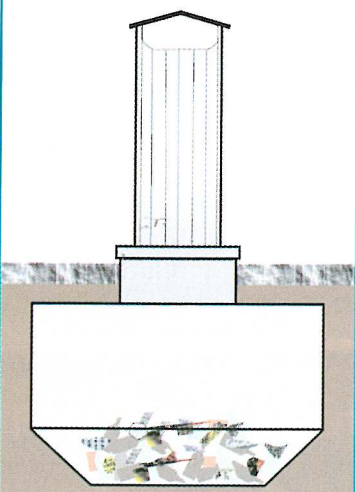
Willich council designed special information boards for the GTM locations, explaining the new system and promoting environmental awareness as part of the council's 'Willich spring clean' initiative. Gerd Neiser reports that the new containers have been accepted well by the general public.

Especially in busy locations, it makes sense to use underground litter bins in addition to the standard bins to reduce collection costs and improve the town's general appearance.

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TOP TO BOTTOM Underground litter bins keep the streets clean and tidy
 ● Emptying takes less than a minute using the suction pipe from a sweeper ● Only the throw-in column of the underground bin can be seen from above ground