

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update for waterway users July 2020: Guidance note 8



General update

First of all, we would like to thank you for your patience over the past few months as we have responded to the Coronavirus pandemic. We have tried to keep you up to date with our response to Government restrictions as the crisis has unfolded, including sending out updates to you after every major announcement regarding our waterways. We understand that some of these messages have been difficult and that it has been a challenging time for all of our customers.

We continue to be delighted however to see so many people out enjoying our waterways. As ever we ask all our waterways users to continue to follow Government guidance on social distancing and to stay alert. The latest Government guidance can be found at www.gov.uk/coronavirus.

Since our previous communication, there have been no new restrictions on our waterways and we have worked hard to resume our operations as best as possible. We are now writing to update you on the progress we have made in the last month and what this means for our waterways going forward.

Safe operations

We are learning a lot about how we need to adapt our ways of working to keep our teams and the public safe during the pandemic. This means that we have been able to implement the required safety measures to allow assisted passage across all of our waterways and nearly all of our lock sites.

Naturally, protecting our staff and the public remains our priority. Many sites have reopened, although there are still a few sites or facilities, including our campsites, which are closed or operating at a reduced capacity. Please do plan your journey before you set off and be aware of the local situation.

To keep up to date with local information, see the following websites:

River Thames: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/river-thames-locks-and-facilities-for-boaters>

Anglian Waterways: <https://www.visitanglianwaterways.org/>

River Medway: <http://allingtonlock.co.uk/home.php>

We are also reviewing how, and where, we may be able to resume our work with volunteers. Volunteers play a really important role in supporting the waterways and we are currently assessing if it is possible and safe to welcome them back to our sites in the near future.

Financial transactions at our sites

We are now able to make financial transactions, including selling boat registrations, at many of our key gateway sites. This includes Allington Lock on the River Medway, Hermitage Lock, Denver Complex and Northampton Marina on the Anglian Waterways and Teddington Lock on the River Thames. We aim to do the same at other sites as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so.

We ask those planning to visit the Thames to check which locks are able to sell registrations before they travel on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Please note that we are only able to accept card payments at the moment and we do ask that customers wear a face mask. Other control measures are also in place and will be explained by the staff and through signage on site. We ask all our customers to look for signage and adhere to the guidance at sites to keep themselves and others safe.

Short period registrations can also be purchased in advance by calling our Boat Registration team on 0330 159 1983 (Mon-Fri 8-5).

Complying with our requirements on the waterways

You may have noticed more of our staff out and about on the waterways recently, both on foot and aboard our patrol launches. As more and more people are getting afloat after lockdown, we are increasing our presence to make sure everybody understands the 'rules of the river' and what they need to do to comply with them. This is especially important with many new customers taking to the water for the first time in kayaks and stand-up paddle boards.

Our staff are especially raising awareness about the need to ensure all boats kept or used on the waterways have a current registration and how to obtain one. They are

also stressing the importance of sticking to the speed limits and not making a breaking wash that could cause damage or endanger other users. Finally, our staff are working to ensure customers keep to the waiting time limits at short-stay moorings, so space is available for those 'passing through' who would like to stop for a short while or overnight. We know that all of these things are important to you, they are to us too.

From 1 August we will be stepping up our approach to ensure that every boat on the water is registered. Not registering a boat when required to by law is not only a criminal offence but it also deprives our waterways of the income that is so crucial to manage and maintain them.

As you will know, we have not been able to print and post a large number of boat registration plates due to the continuing restrictions on office access. We have taken the decision that we will not issue registration plates for the remainder of this year, even if our offices are able to open again. This means that a large number of boats may appear not to be registered, even when they are. Please don't be concerned about this, our officers are able to determine the status of a boat's registration very easily from our database, even when working from home or aboard our patrol launches.

Boat registration update

Our Boat Registration team are still experiencing a high volume of emails and applications. They are working really hard to respond as quickly as possible. Can I also remind you that we do not recommend you send postal applications at the moment; as the team are working from home, these are taking a lot longer to process.

We also remind you that the temporary extension to recently expired Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) certification ends on 31 July so all boats that were covered by this waiver should have a new BSS certification by this date. If you are experiencing any difficulty, please let us know as soon as possible.

We do again thank all of our customers for being patient at this time. If you need to contact the team, please email boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk. For any general boat registration enquiries please call 03708 506506 (Mon-Fri 8-5).

Increase in use of our waterways

We have been really pleased to see an increase in the use of our waterways by unpowered boats such as canoes and paddle boards. It is wonderful news that more

people are appreciating the great outdoors and getting out on the water to enjoy the natural environment.

We want to make sure these new users are aware of the need to register, so over the summer we will be working to raise awareness of this requirement as well as sharing key safety messages. Really positive news is that British Canoeing have seen a large increase in their membership in recent weeks, with 11,000 new members. You can read more about this on their website [here](#).

So in summary, it is wonderful to see our customers, both commercial and private, new and old, back out enjoying the rivers again. As there are no specific Government restrictions in place on our waterways, this will be the last guidance note of this kind unless there are any significant changes to how we need to operate. We will of course keep you informed of any changes but for now thank you again for your patience and we hope you continue to stay safe and enjoy your boating for the remainder of the year.

For the full Government guidance on coronavirus go to www.gov.uk/coronavirus.

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