

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Urgent update for boaters

April 2020: Guidance note 2

These are fast changing times and following our last communication we wanted to expand on some of the measures we are taking on Environment Agency navigations. We are continuing to follow Government advice during this Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and our main priority remains protecting the health of our staff, customers and the general public.

Since our last communication a week ago, we have seen the movement of boats on our waterways reduce and would like to thank those adhering to Government guidance. However, we are still seeing some non-essential travel. We therefore reiterate our advice to stop non-essential travel on our waterways and to make journeys only to access essential services and facilities.

Boat registration and Boat Safety Scheme

We need to continue management and regulation of our waterways in order to protect the environment and the public. The basis of funding for this work remains our fees and charges, including for boat registration and moorings.

This means:

- If you keep or use your boat on one of our waterways, you still need to register it as required by the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010. The income we receive from boat registration is vital for us to continue to manage and maintain our waterways.
- We understand the challenges Coronavirus is causing and that some customers are particularly affected by the recent measures to restrict the spread of the virus.
- As our Boat Registration team is working remotely at the moment in line with Government guidance, we are not able to print and send out registration plates. Therefore, when you register, you will only receive confirmation of your payment by email. We will send your registration plate as soon as we are able to do so. In the meantime we will not expect you to display a valid registration plate on your boat.
- We understand that some customers may have Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) certification which has expired or is due to expire within the next few months. As customers are not able to get new certification at this time due to the current government restrictions and advice, we will be extending certification until 14 April 2020. This is in line with the agreed position issued by the BSS on behalf of ourselves and the Canal & River Trust.

- You will be aware that we have been carrying out a strategic review of our boat registration charges and are due to consult on our proposals this spring. We recognise now is not the right time for a consultation of this nature and we have taken the decision to postpone this work. This means implementation of a new charge scheme will be delayed until 2022.

What we are doing to maintain safe operations

- The Environment Agency will continue to provide an appropriate level of waterway management, regulation and services for our customers during these extraordinary times and ensure that the environment is protected. We have agreed ways of working for our operational field teams to reduce the risk to themselves and the public of contracting Coronavirus whilst undertaking essential work.
- Currently, where it is possible to safely carry out construction or maintenance work on our assets we will try to do so. Any work will of course be dependent on a safe system of work being in place which complies with the current social distancing requirements.
- We advise customers who are navigating to access essential services or facilities to be aware of the possibility of unmarked hazards or obstructions to navigation (such as fallen trees and shoals). As we have had to reduce operations by our staff, we are unable to respond to these as normal. Therefore we ask customers to exercise particular care and caution on our waterways at this time.

We will be keeping these restrictions under constant review in the light of the developing situation and advice from Government, but we expect them to be in place until at least 14 April 2020. Again, our priority is to keep our staff and customers safe.

You will appreciate our National Customer Contact Centre is very busy at this time, please help us by getting in touch only if it's essential. If you do need to contact us, we encourage you to email us at enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

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

Thank you all for your co-operation during these very challenging times for everyone.

Alice Mayne

Deputy Director for Navigation and Commercial Development