

Notice for non-tidal Thames boaters: July 2018

Low flows and high temperatures - impacts on boating

Low flows - what to be aware of

Water levels in the non-tidal River Thames may be shallower than you are used to in some places, due to the current period of prolonged dry weather.

With this in mind we are asking boaters take extra care, especially immediately downstream of locks where the natural gradient of the river means levels are always slightly lower than elsewhere in the reach.

For your safety, we have marked all known shallow areas in the main navigation channel (the middle third of the river, also known as the 'fairway') with red and green buoys. Please ensure you are familiar with the rules of navigation around obstructions marked in this way - they are there to protect you and your boat from harm. You may find the diagram overleaf helpful.

Remember, boats coming towards you may have to manoeuvre around an obstruction even if you don't. Also, other boats may be harder to handle than yours, and their skippers less experienced, so please be considerate.

Where we can, we will also mark obstructions that we are aware of, or are reported to us, outside of the main navigation channel. We cannot mark every one however, so do please be vigilant. You can report an obstruction to us on 03708 506 506. Please also remember that a mooring may be shallower than the last time you used it.

We are doing all that we can to maintain the depths of navigation as published on www.gov.uk

Actions we have or plan to take taking include closing all our weirs and placing 'summer boards' on those that can accommodate them to raise their height. This helps to maintain water levels for a longer period of time. We are also carrying out additional checks for any leaks in our weir gates and ensuring they are staunch.

In addition, we will be instructing our lock staff to try to avoid emptying locks unless they contain at least one boat, wherever possible. This ensures we are making the most of the considerable volume of water that is released downstream each time a lock is used.

If you operate a lock yourself, normal protocol is to close both sets of lock gates after you, but leave the sluices on the tail gates open so that the lock slowly drains of water. This reduces algal growth on the lock chamber walls. However, to help conserve water, when heading *upstream* please now close both sets of gates as normal but leave the head sluices open and the tail sluices closed instead. This will prevent the lock from emptying and then needing to be refilled if the next boat to use it approaches from upstream. Applied across the river this simple technique could save a considerable volume of water.

Where possible we will also ask our lock staff to advise you of any known shallow areas ahead of you. To help you assess whether or not to continue your journey, you may want to check your boat's draft if you don't already know it. Above Iffley Lock we cannot guarantee the navigation channel will always be sufficiently deep for craft with a draft of 0.9m or more.

If water levels continue to drop, it will be increasingly difficult for us to maintain depths, even if we implement additional measures such as restricted lock use. We hope to avoid the need for additional measures but may not be able to if existing weather conditions persist.

We are of course monitoring the situation very closely and will communicate any further developments you need to be aware of. You can subscribe to get advised of any river restrictions and closures by emailing riverthames@environment-agency.gov.uk. You can also check the 'Information for boaters' section of <http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk> for updates.

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88

Hot weather impacts

Please also be aware that, to minimise the potential impacts of the current hot weather on our lock staff we have instructed them to take 2 additional 15 minute breaks, one at 11am and one at 4pm. Our volunteer assistant lock keepers will also take an additional 15 minute break each morning and afternoon, but wherever possible, this will be at different times so that we can continue to offer assisted passage. We know that this decision may slightly increase the amount of time that locks are on self-service, but we feel that this is a sensible precaution to reduce the potential for heat-induced sickness which would have a more severe impact.

Please also consider your own welfare and that of any crew and passengers when cruising in hot, sunny weather. Wear loose, cool and ideally UV resistant clothing, sun protection cream, a sunhat, sunglasses, and drink plenty of water. If you feel faint at any point while on the move, let someone else take control or moor up immediately and rest in the shade until you've recovered. Avoid or limit alcohol consumption as it increases dehydration. Please also resist the temptation to take a dip to cool off, but do be on the lookout for others who may be swimming in the river. When approaching bridges, please also look out for people jumping off them. Although highly dangerous, this does happen.

Thank you for your understanding and co-operation.

Marking obstructions

The diagram below shows the system of marking for shoals and other obstructions on the River Thames. The four shapes of top marks used – can, triangle, sphere and two spheres – are shown, together with directions for passing them safely when going upstream. When going downstream the reverse applies.

- Wrecks or other obstructions in midstream are marked by an isolated danger buoy, which may be passed on any side. Where they must be passed on a particular side the appropriate can or triangle top marks will be used.
- In all cases boats should pass well clear of a marking buoy.
- A large RED disk usually means the navigation arch of a bridge is closed.

Note: The Environment Agency is not responsible for marking obstructions that lie outside the navigation channel. You must proceed with particular caution when approaching any bank or if you leave the main navigation channel.

