

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Urgent Update for Boaters

May 2020: Guidance Note 4

Following the Government announcement on 10 May about plans to relax some of the restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19), we wanted to let you know how this affects our advice for Environment Agency navigations. Firstly, we are continuing to follow Government advice during this Coronavirus pandemic and our main priority remains protecting the health of our staff, customers and the general public.

The Government have clearly stated that it is far too early to make fundamental changes to the social distancing requirements in relation to the Coronavirus emergency. So at this stage, we want to reiterate that boaters should avoid all non-essential travel on our waterways for the next few weeks and to make journeys only to access essential services and facilities-This will help ensure safety of boaters and staff.

We know boat owners have told us they are keen to get back out on the water in the near future. We are working hard to prepare for boaters to get out on the water as soon as it is safe to do so. Environment Agency teams will prepare for boat travel to resume by undertaking inspections and maintenance to river channels and structures to ensure they are safe.

In light of the Prime Minister's announcement, lifting restrictions on spending time outdoors and allowing car travel to outdoor spaces irrespective of distance from Wednesday, boat owners can visit their boats from today (Wednesday 13 May 2020) to ensure they are well maintained, registered and ready for use once restrictions are lifted.

We will work as fast as we can to get the navigations ready for non-essential leisure cruising. We hope to allow some leisure cruising from June and will provide a further update setting out how and when you will be able to resume further leisure boating over the coming weeks.

We appreciate the boating community are keen to head out on the waterways at this time of year and we understand the huge strain this continues to put on the boating and leisure industry. However we believe that this is still the right thing to do at this time to help ensure safety of our customers and staff.

In line with the Government announcements about slight changes to the lockdown, from Wednesday you may see the resumption of angling and watersports on our waterways. We continue to encourage all waterways users to respect the needs of our residential waterways community and maintain appropriate social distancing, following the guidance of organisations such as British Canoeing and British Rowing where it is available.

Restart planning

We are continuing to work hard to deliver our critical asset management activities in order to keep our waterways safe and to support essential travel. Where possible we are ensuring safe passage to essential facilities that support the welfare of residential boaters (water, pump outs, fuel points etc.). However, in the short term we will still not be able to provide assisted passage at sites that can be self-operated by boaters for essential travel; we will only operate those

locks where our staff have to provide this service and this will be done with a safe system of work to ensure social distancing is complied with.

We have been planning over recent weeks for how we can deliver a safe level of service ready for when boaters are able to resume cruising. We will share a clear roadmap of how and when you will be able to resume leisure boating over the coming weeks.

Provided we can do so safely, and in line with Government guidance, we will continue to respond to incidents that pose an immediate risk to users of the waterway, for example asset failure that prevents essential passage or responding to blockages that significantly affect water level management and could therefore present a risk to public or staff safety.

For the time being, mooring exemptions remain in place however these will be reviewed as part of the plan for resumption of leisure cruising.

Boat registration

The recent announcements mean that boaters may well be able to get back out to their boats in the near future. It is therefore essential that boats are registered in line with the requirements of the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010, which means that owners of all boats kept or used on our waterways need to register them and pay the registration charge.

We recognise the wide range of challenges Coronavirus is causing across the country and that some customers are particularly affected by the recent measures to restrict the impact of the virus. We do understand that some customers may now experience difficulty in paying for their registration and so we have put in place several payment options at this exceptional time. Customers who are renewing their registration can get in touch with our Boat Registration team to discuss the payment options we can offer to help. Please call 0330 159 1983 from 10am – 4pm Monday to Friday or email boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk

For any general navigation enquiries including making a new application customers should call 03708 506506.

Please be aware that due to changing our ways of working to meet Government guidance we are not able to process application by post at the moment. You will find more information about our current payment methods in annex 1 below.

Boat Safety Scheme

It is our firm intention to re-start Boat Safety Scheme Examinations as soon as it is possible and safe to do so. We are working with stakeholders on a plan that will continue to protect boat owners, examiners and other people such as those working in marinas.

We urge those boat owners who can, to book their Examinations as soon as their circumstances allow. This will help examiners to get organised and we can start getting boats Certificated as soon as it is safely possible.

We are also advising boat owners to keep an eye out on the BSS website and social media feeds for a commencement date and more information about preparing their boats for examination.

The Scheme's Management Committee and participating Navigation Authorities have agreed to further extend the current waiver on BSS Certifications to 31 July 2020.

As BSS examinations have been suspended since late March, there is now a considerable backlog of boats needing to renew their Certifications. In recognition of this, we want to give customers sufficient time to arrange their boat examinations, once restrictions are eased.

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

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

Alice Mayne

Deputy Director for Navigation and Commercial Development

Annex 1: Boat registration payment methods

Direct debit – by email

If you'd like to renew and set up a new Direct Debit, please download the mandate from <https://www.gov.uk/register-a-boat/who-to-contact> and send this to:

Email - boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk - using "Direct Debit renewal" as the email subject and quoting:

name and address

boat registration number

boat name (powered or houseboats only)

insurance provider, policy number and expiry date (powered or houseboats only)

Boat Safety Scheme certification if applicable

Bank transfer - by email

If you'd like to renew and set up payment by bank transfer, please make payment to:

Bank: NatWest (may show as Royal Bank of Scotland plc)

Bank address: London Corporate Service Centre, CPB Services 2nd Floor, 280 Bishopsgate, London, EC2M 4RB

Account name: Environment Agency

Sort code: 60-70-80

Account number: 10014411

Please ensure you add a reference to your payment quoting your boat registration number and waterway of use. e.g. Thames, Medway or Anglian. This will enable us to match your payment to your paperwork and not delay your registration.

customer service line **03708 506 506**

incident hotline **0800 80 70 60**

floodline **03459 88 11 88**

Page 3 of 4

I am sure you appreciate we will be receiving many more payments in this way and we want to make sure we handle your application as efficiently as possible. Simply ensuring you include the reference will help us enormously – thank you!

Then send an email to:

Email - boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk - using “Bank transfer renewal” as the email subject and quoting:

name and address

boat registration number

boat name (powered or houseboats only)

insurance provider, policy number and expiry date (powered or houseboats only)

Boat Safety Scheme certification if applicable

Card payment - by telephone

We are working on being able to take payment by card over the telephone again. Please ask about this option when you call.