

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Update for Boaters

April 2020: Guidance Note 3

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 message the Government have stated that it is too early to make a change to the current heightened response to the Coronavirus emergency. We therefore reiterate the advice to stop non-essential travel on our waterways and to make journeys only to access essential services and facilities. We expect these restrictions to remain in place until at least the middle of May 2020. We realise this is difficult at the time our customers are traditionally getting their boats ready and heading out onto the waterways.

Boat registration

The provisions of the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010 mean that owners of all boats kept or used on our waterways need to register them and pay the registration charge. The income we receive from boat registration charges is vital for us to continue to manage and maintain our waterways, ensuring people and the environment are protected from harm. We have made adjustments to our working practices to work within the new restrictions, so our staff are continuing to work hard to monitor and manage water levels and provide an appropriate level of service and maintenance.

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 in a single amount and there are several payment options available 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.

Due to changing our ways of working to meet Government guidance we are unable to take card payments over the phone or receive applications by post at the moment. When you contact us you will be given 3 options of how to pay for your registration (see payments method section at the end of this message for more detail):

- > Set up a direct debit
- > Pay by bank transfer or
- > Receive an invoice

Please also note that you are not required to travel to your boat specifically to display your registration certificate.

Boat Safety Scheme

We are extending the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) certification until 11 May 2020 for those customers whose certificates have recently expired or are about to expire within the next few months. This will be reviewed as the situation develops but we understand that for now customers are not able to get new certification without breaching current government restrictions and advice. This approach is in line with the agreed position issued by the BSS on behalf of ourselves and the Canal & River Trust.

What we are doing to maintain safe operations

We are working hard to deliver our critical asset management activities to keep our waterways safe and to support essential travel. In providing this service we are operating in line with the government's guideline that people should stay at home except for essential travel. This aims to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus and ensure we protect the health and wellbeing of our staff, contractors and the general public.

This means we are:

Operating our assets, where possible, to provide passage to essential facilities that support the welfare of residential boaters (water, pump outs, fuel points etc.). We will not 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.

Maintaining our assets to support these critical activities where it is safe to do so and safe access to the asset is possible and social distancing requirements can be met.

Continuing to assure the performance, statutory compliance and reliability of our assets that support the provision of welfare services by carrying out inspections at those critical assets where safe to do so.

Provided we can do so safely, and in line with Government guidance, we will 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.

Where it is safe and practicable to do so, and in line with current government construction advice, we will continue to invest in our asset base to improve the condition and reliability of our assets. This means we will be able to continue investing the £14.8m of capital funding provided for navigation by government this financial year.

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: 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

The removal of the credit card option for the time being may make this a good option for you, and rest assured that you can cancel your Direct Debit for future years at any time once normal processes are resumed.

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.

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