

water safety

staying safe around water

visiting our waterways is popular and fun, but there are some important things that you need to know to make sure that your visit is a safe one.



water safety information

Water claims the lives of more than 50 children a year in the UK. Drowning is among the leading causes of accidental death.

Under-estimating the dangers of water can have tragic consequences. You may be able to swim well in a warm indoor pool, but that does not mean you will be able to swim in cold water.

The key to staying safe is making the right choices to avoid getting into difficulty in the first place. This leaflet highlights some of the features and structures to be aware of, and offers top tips to help you enjoy our waterways safely.

These are our top tips for staying safe around water:

Take notice of safety information, warning signs and flags.

Younger children may not recognise the dangers, and need to be supervised by an adult.

Do not jump or dive into rivers. Quick entry into cold water can cause your body to go into shock. Also it's difficult to judge the depth just by looking, there can be submerged dangers such as weed or rubbish.

Be aware of strong currents and don't go into water near locks, weirs, sluices, bridges and pipes as these structures are often linked with strong currents.

The water in rivers and lakes can be colder than you expect at any time of the year. Cold water shock will affect your ability to swim, look after yourself, or rescue others. It's a key reason why many people drown.

Get trained in lifesaving and resuscitation techniques. Know what to do in an emergency.

Airbeds, inner tubes and other flotation devices can easily be carried or blown in to deep water and may not keep you afloat.

Consuming alcohol will impair your ability and judgement in and around water.

There are lots of activities you can do on our waterways such as fishing, canoeing or strolling along the footpath or towpath. Make sure that your visit is a safe one by joining a club or knowing the dangers associated with some of the structures you may see.

Locks

Locks are structures that allow boats to travel up and down a waterway. Never swim in or near a lock, even if there are no boats around. The gates can without warning, slam shut with great force created by water pressure.

Some locks have guillotine gates. As they open strong currents pour through or beneath these gates. Never swim near or climb on these structures. The moving parts which lift the gates are dangerous and can trap or injure you.

Boat users may not be able to see anyone in the water as their line of sight is poor. They may not hear anyone over the sound of the engine. Boats do not have brakes and cannot stop or turn quickly.

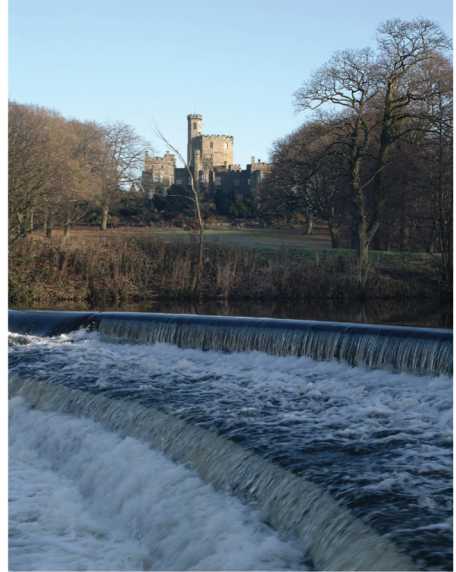


Weirs

Weirs are structures that help to maintain water levels.

Water currents at weirs form 'stoppers'. These are very strong currents that can drag you under the water and hold you there.

Do not climb these structures or enter the water or swim near a weir.



Bridges

Never jump or 'tombstone' from bridges. You will not be able to estimate how deep the river is.

Sudden immersion in cold water can cause your body to go into shock.



Sluices

Sluices are structures that control the flow of a river. Some open and close automatically without warning.

The rush of water as it empties into the river will sweep away anyone swimming near these structures.

Do not climb these structures or enter the water or swim near a sluice.

Safety Signs

We only place signs where they are most needed. Our safety information is used at sites with nearby dangers that are not always obvious. Please read and follow the advice.

Most of the time that you are near a river or waterway, there won't be any signs but the dangers are still there. So to be safe, stay away from the edge and don't go in.



Learn how to help

You may be able to help yourself and others if you know what to do in an emergency.

In some places you will find specialist life saving equipment, such as lifebuoys.

Never tamper with or remove life-saving equipment except for use in an emergency.

How to help someone in the water:

Stay calm, and try to think clearly

Keep yourself safe – you are no use to the victim if you end up in trouble too. Avoid going in as much as you can.

Get more help – shout for others nearby, call 999 on your phone.

Try to...

Talk them in – try to encourage and talk them into a safe place, be clear and positive in your instructions.

Throw – a piece of rescue equipment, rope, a ball to help them float. Or,

Reach - with a rope, a branch, paddle, jumper or belt or whatever comes to hand easily.

Encourage anyone who has been in trouble in water - particularly children, or anyone who has ingested water - to go to hospital. Try to keep them warm whilst an ambulance arrives.

There are many items you can use to help someone who's in trouble, either to reach the bank or to stay afloat until help arrives.

If there is a **rope** nearby, keep hold of one end and throw the rest of the coil just beyond the person. When they have got hold of the rope, go down on one knee and pull them towards the edge.

Throw a **ball** to land on the water next to the person. Tell them to put their arms around it, kick their legs and try to swim to the edge. You may have to allow for the wind when you throw it.

An **oar, branch** or other long object can be used to reach the person. Go down on one knee, reach out with the object and tell them to hold onto the end of it. You can then pull them towards the edge.

A **plastic bottle** or any other container which can hold air can be used to help someone stay afloat. If you leave it about 1/4 full then it will make it easier and more accurate to throw and won't get carried away by the wind.

Clothing can be used to pull someone to the edge if there are no other long objects handy. Hold one end and throw the other end towards them. Remember to go down on one knee to help keep your balance when pulling them.

**Would you like to find out more about us,
or about your environment?**

**Then call us on
03708 506 506 (Mon–Fri 8–6)**

Calls to 03 numbers cost the same as calls to standard geographic numbers (i.e. numbers beginning with 01 or 02).

**email
enquiries@environment–agency.gov.uk
or visit our website
www.environment–agency.gov.uk**

**incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 (24hrs)
floodline 0845 988 1188**