

# Be safe this summer when swimming near water structures

With the summer holidays approaching, the Environment Agency is reminding people to take care while swimming near its structures.

The Environment Agency owns and maintains assets, such locks and sluices, in many locations across East Anglia's river network and on the coast. Swimming too close to them can be dangerous and could lead to serious injury or even death. It is also an offence.

Paul Separovic, Waterways Team Leader at the Environment Agency, said:

We work to advise on the safety risks connected with our river structures in partnership with local councils and landowners.

Throughout the summer period, we see people put themselves at risk by ignoring advice and swimming in dangerous places, which can have serious, even tragic, consequences.

The Environment Agency looks after many structures that keep waterways safe, navigation channels clear and properties protected from flooding.

The structures carry warning signs that outline the impact of strong currents, underwater structures and sudden changes in depths, which can all pose a serious risk to even the most experienced swimmers.

Those who ignore the warnings are not only potentially putting their lives at risk but also committing an offence that could lead to a day in court and a fine of up to £1,000.

Jumping or diving off the assets – which include weirs, sluices, locks and pumping stations – is strictly prohibited and could cause serious injury.

## **Tips for staying safe around rivers:**

- don't jump or dive in as the depth may vary and there can be unseen hazards
- don't go in near weirs, locks, pipes, and sluices. These and some other water features are often linked with strong currents
- inland waters can be very cold, no matter how warm the weather. Those going into cold water can get cramp and experience breathing difficulties very quickly

- keep an eye out for boat traffic – boaters, especially on larger vessels, can find it very hard to spot swimmers, and propellers cause severe life changing and life threatening injuries every year

## **Parents and guardians can help keep children in their care safe by:**

- teaching them to swim and educating them about risks and where it is safe to go swimming
- warning them not to go into the water alone, or unsupervised
- ensuring they know where their children are and what they are doing
- supervising them closely when near any open water

Drowning can occur very quickly, even in shallow water, and the key to keeping safe is to take all necessary precautions to avoid getting into difficulty in the first place.

Experience shows it is often young people who get into trouble while swimming in open water that contains hazards, particularly in and around structures such as locks, weirs, and bridges. Unexpectedly cold waters or strong currents can also catch bathers off guard.

## **Further information**

An offence is being committed when swimming within 36 metres of Environment Agency structures.

On Anglian navigations, there is a Public Right of Navigation, which only applies to registered users, to pass and repass via a craft and does not include swimming.

For further details about the dangers of wild swimming, follow guidance from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Royal National Lifeboats Institute.

For reducing the risk of illness when swimming in open water see guidance from the Environment Agency and Public Health England: