

# Stay safe around rivers, warns Environment Agency

The Environment Agency is warning people of the dangers of swimming near or jumping off its locks, weirs, and bridges after police were forced to clear around 300 swimmers and sunbathers from a single site yesterday, amidst soaring temperatures and the easing of lockdown restrictions.

Police issued a dispersal order after hundreds of swimmers flocked to Houghton Lock on the Great River Ouse near Huntingdon.

Those gathering were taking unnecessary risks by not social distancing, and swimming too close to an Environment Agency structure in water that could pose hidden dangers for even the strongest swimmers, such as strong currents, underwater hazards and even algae that could make people ill.

Irven Forbes, Anglian Waterways Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

“We manage a large number of structures like locks and weirs to keep our waterways safe, keep our navigation channels clear, and keep homes protected from flooding.

“Every summer we see people put themselves at risk by ignoring warning signs and swimming where it isn’t safe, and we know this can have serious, even tragic, consequences.

“Please don’t take the chance – follow posted safety warnings and guidance from the authorities. If you don’t, you’re risking your life, and you could face a day in court and a steep fine.”

Increased numbers of people have been noted across many Environment Agency structures and sites – despite warnings year on year of the dangers.

But this year, as the country emerges from lockdown, the behaviour poses additional risks not just to those breaking the rules, but to local residents, and is putting additional pressure on police and EA resources.

[Guidance on gov.uk](#) – search ‘staying safe around water’ – shows the message is clear: vigilance can save lives, and water-related accidents can be avoided by knowing how to stay safe.

Top tips for river safety:

- 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 a look out for boat traffic. Boaters, especially on larger vessels, can find it very hard to spot swimmers.

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

- Teaching them to swim
- \* Warning them not to go into water alone, or unsupervised
- \* Ensuring they know where the 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 whilst swimming in open water, which 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.

For further details about the dangers of wild swimming, follow guidance from [Public Health England](#), [the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents](#), and [the Royal National Lifeboats Institute](#).