

Thames Barrier closed for 200th time

The Thames Barrier is being closed for the 200th time today (Thursday 21 October) to help protect London from potential flooding.

The Environment Agency is closing the barrier to protect London from a high tide as a result of low pressure and northerly winds coinciding with spring tides. Closure of the barrier will reduce the risk of flooding for up to 640,000 properties in London and along the Thames.

The barrier's 10 steel gates will begin to move at around 10:45, taking around 90 minutes to close, ahead of the high tide at around 14:30. The barrier will then reopen at approximately 18:00 this evening.

The Thames Barrier is the second largest moveable flood barrier in the world, protecting 125 square kilometres of central London, encompassing 1.4 million people, 400 schools, 16 hospitals, and 86 train and tube stations. It forms part of the Thames Tidal Defences, which also includes the Barking and Dartford Creek Barriers.

Andy Batchelor, Operations Manager for the Thames Tidal Defences, said:

Since becoming operational in 1982, the Thames Barrier has offered our capital world class flood protection. Without it, the centre of London would have potentially been inundated on multiple occasions and millions of people would have been at risk from the misery of flooding.

The Barrier will continue to provide that protection until at least 2070, but as we see the effect of the climate emergency with rising sea levels we're investing a further £54m in London, providing funding to more than 50 schemes to tackle all sources of flooding.

The closure comes as the Environment Agency warns of increasing sea levels along the Thames Estuary, as a result of climate change. We continue to work with our partners to deliver a long-term plan, known as [Thames Estuary 2100](#), to protect London from tidal flooding through the next century, and sets out a series of recommendations for how the Environment Agency and partners can work together to manage these rising sea levels – including a potential new barrier.

Charlotte Wood, the Environment Agency's London Area Director, said:

The Thames Estuary 2100 Plan is internationally recognised as a leading example of climate change adaptation and the 200th closure of the Thames Barrier marks another significant milestone as we continue to adapt to a changing climate.

Our collaboration with councils, communities, businesses and NGOs is vital as we continue to better protect people and properties from flooding, as well as providing the opportunity to reshape our riversides and adapt to climate change.

The Thames Barrier is made up of 10 steel gates spanning 520 metres (1,706 feet) across the River Thames near Woolwich. Until today and since it became operational in 1982, it has closed on 199 occasions, 110 times to protect against tidal flooding and 89 times to protect against combined sea and river flooding. Each gate takes 10 to 15 minutes to close (one-and-a-half hours for total closure of the barrier), and the control room is manned 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

The defences were constructed following the 1953 floods that swept down the east coast and killed over 300 people. While it is designed to provide protection for London until at least 2070, work is already underway on the Thames Estuary 2100 project, which includes a number of measures that will make the capital resilient until at least the end of the century.

While the barrier will help to protect London from tidal flooding, there are also risks from coastal flooding along the east coast on Thursday and Friday. Heavy rain also means that there is a separate but concurrent risk of river flooding across the south of England.

As of 07:45 on Thursday, there are 53 Flood Warnings and 108 Flood Alerts in force, with Environment Agency teams out on the ground clearing waste grilles and screens and standing ready to support local authorities in their response to surface water flooding.

People should stay alert and check their flood risk by [signing up for free flood warnings](#) on the Gov.uk website and via @EnvAgency on Twitter, which offer the latest updates.

Further information

- Since 1982 the Thames Barrier has been closed 200 times for flood defence purposes.
- The Thames Barrier is one of the largest moveable flood barriers in the world, protecting 125 square km of central London – encompassing 1.25 million people and the infrastructure on which London is dependent.
- During the winter of 2013/14 the Thames Barrier closed 50 times, its busiest flood season ever.
- Each gate takes 10 to 15 minutes to close (1½ hours for total Barrier closure).
- The 61 metre gates have up to 200 tonnes of paint on them.
- The deepest foundation is 17 metres (56ft) below the sea bed which is equivalent to four double-decker buses stacked on top of each other.
- Around 90 people work at the Barrier site and the control room is manned 24 hours a day, every day of the year.
- Costs to complete the tidal defences were estimated at £535 million in 1982 (valued at approximately £1,400 million at 2009 prices). The

Barrier took eight years to build using 99% UK components.

- It costs around £8 million a year to maintain and operate. In addition we also spend approximately £10 million on capital improvements to the defences.
- The Thames Barrier consists of 10 gates, six of which are rising sector gates that, when lowered, lie flat against the river bed allowing river users (ships, boats etc) to pass but, when raised, prevent levels rising on the upstream side of the Barrier.
- For further information please visit Thames Barrier webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-thames-barrier>.
- With more extreme weather expected, including summer temperatures up to 7.4°C hotter and 59% more rainfall by 2050, the Environment Agency's [Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy](#) sets out how we will build up the resilience of millions more homes and businesses as part of the EA's green recovery plan into the next decade.