

PRESS RELEASE

14th June 2022

Canal charity asks people to enjoy the waterways in London and the South East safely this summer

- As the temperature rises people mustn't ignore safety by taking a life-threatening dip
 - There are hidden risks under the surface of the water
- Charity asks people to have fun but to 'stay away from the edge'

The Canal & River Trust, the waterways and wellbeing charity which cares for 200 miles of waterways across London and the South East, is urging people to stay out of the water and to stay away from the edge this summer.

Summer is one of the most popular times for people to visit our region's canals and rivers, and the Trust is expecting many of its waterways to be particularly popular this year. During the past two summers of 2020 and 2021, canals and docks were a local outdoor lifeline for many people in London and the South East, and visits in urban areas more than doubled as people headed to one of the Trust's canals or rivers for their exercise and to get closer to nature.

Locks and weirs are lovely places to spend time for gongoozling – watching boats go by – and listening to the calming sounds of the water. However, when the weather warms people sometimes get into difficulties after jumping into the canals and rivers to cool down. Locks have hidden 'shelves', called cills, which can seriously injure someone should they jump in, whilst weirs and deeper water such as Brent Reservoir or London Docklands can have strong currents which can pull even the strongest swimmers under the water.

Of the 400 people who drown in the UK every year (1), more than half the fatalities happen at inland waters such as canals, rivers, lakes, quarries and reservoirs (2). The Trust is a member of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), a voluntary network of organisations working together to reduce water-related deaths and works with fellow members of the NWSF to raise awareness of water safety.

The charity is asking people to experience all the safe ways to enjoy the waterways this summer and to avoid getting in the water:

- Docks, reservoirs, canals and rivers will be really cold, even in the summer. Jumping into cold water could give you cold water shock which can cause a gasp reflex, meaning you'll suck in water, which could cause you to drown. If you want to cool down, have a cool drink instead.
- If you want to jump and dive, head to your local swimming pool, don't get in locks or canals. Canals can be shallow and you could hurt yourself if you jump in.
- Sign up to a Let's Paddle session run by the Trust to cool down on a paddleboard. Check the website for more information.
- Lounge in the shade of waterside trees, rather than get tangled in waterway reeds.
- Have an ice lolly at a waterside café.
- Keep your cool – chill out by the water and enjoy the feeling of peacefulness it brings you.

Ros Daniels at the Canal & River Trust, said:

“Spending time on or by London and the South East’s waterways is a lovely way to spend a summer’s day and they are excellent places for families to explore during the warm weather. But it’s also important that people, especially children and teenagers, are aware of the dangers of cooling off by going for a dip. The consequences can be devastating.

“Inland waterways, like canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks can look really inviting but you can’t tell what is below the surface. Even if you are familiar with a stretch of water, it doesn’t mean there aren’t risks. The water often isn’t clear and you won’t be able to see the depth or any obstacles in the water. If you want to swim outside, find an open water swimming club near you by visiting our website.”

The Canal & River Trust ‘Explorers’ water safety programme, which focuses on children in Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum, aims to help young people learn about and enjoy their local canal or river safely and can also be used towards a number of Cub Scout and Brownie badges. Dozens of volunteers nationwide help the Trust each year by visiting schools and speaking to youth groups about their local canal or river.

If you’d like to see the free resources available or if you’re interested in helping the Trust educate young people about their local canal or river, visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers

To find out more about staying safe near canals and rivers, go to:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/safety-on-our-waterways/summer-water-safety>

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For further information, including filming and interview opportunities, please contact:
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#BeWaterSafe #RespectTheWater

Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk @CanalRiverTrust

The Canal & River Trust is a member of the National Water Safety Forum.

Reference:

- (1) Statistic based on the WAID data (Water Incident Database) 2014 published by the National Water Safety Forum.
- (2) Statistic based on the WAID data (Water Incident Database) 2014 published by the National Water Safety Forum.