

## Safety Alert - what do you do if you see a red flag?

From time to time river and other navigation authorities issue information about the safety of conditions on their waterway, these are often based on the water flow rate or velocity. This information can be in the form of coloured (typically red or yellow) flags or boards. It is always important to know what information is currently being posted before starting any activity on the water.

The first step for Clubs is to determine the status of the information being provided by their local navigation authority. Is it a prohibition or is it a warning? If it is a prohibition then it should be treated as such and no boats should go afloat.

If it is a warning, or cautionary notice, then it should be treated with respect, but it may still be safe to start a water based activity. However, many other conditions will have to be assessed.

Activities on the water should only happen if a risk assessment shows that the level of risk is acceptable. This risk assessment should take all relevant factors into account, including those listed below:-

- Flow speed
- Presence of turbulence, for example around obstructions, bends, etc.
- Water surface conditions
- Wind strength and other weather conditions
- Presence of other hazards (e.g. bridges, pontoons, weirs, etc.) that crews could be swept into or over
- Presence of other river users
- Presence of floating debris or water contamination
- Strength and endurance and confidence of crew
- Willingness of every individual member of the crew to take part
- Size and stability of boat
- Competence of the cox (or steers)
- Any other factor that applies to the conditions, club, crew, boat, location, etc.

Do not forget the cox. It takes great skill and knowledge to control a boat on fast moving waters. It is best not to go afloat unless you know that your cox (or steers) is capable of handling the conditions and that they feel confident to do so. There is training material for coxes (and steers) at [rowhow.org/course/view.php?id=114](http://rowhow.org/course/view.php?id=114).

If there is no warning then do not assume that it is safe to start an activity. The factors listed above should still be considered.

**If in doubt, don't go out.**

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February 2016