

Biggest Boat Clean-up in a Decade Underway on Upper Thames

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Environment Agency plans to remove blight in time for new season “Sunk, wrecked, abandoned - they’ve got to go” says Deputy Director of Navigation

The Environment Agency is on course to remove over 100 sunk and abandoned vessels from the non-tidal Thames in its biggest push in a decade on tidying up the watercourse. The work has been spearheaded by a newly created task force whose mission is to deal with some of the long-standing challenges that the Thames faces. This includes old and discarded boats as well as those that are unregistered or left at unauthorised moorings.

So far this year it has already removed 53 abandoned boats that were mostly left on riverbanks on the lower part of the river. This latest operation is to focus on the remaining sunk and abandoned boats across the non-tidal Thames.

Removed boat at Caversham Lock.

Environment Agency Navigation Operations Deputy Director Bill Jephson said:

Irresponsible boat owners have caused a blight on the Thames for far too long. We know the impact these boats can have on river users and local residents. It's time to start with a clean slate. Sunk, wrecked or abandoned, they've got to go.

It is actually the owner's responsibility to remove their sunken wrecks and where owners can be identified, the Environment Agency will look to recover costs.

Boats on the river need to be registered and comply with the Environment Agency's requirements including insurance and a valid boat safety certificate. Owners are given ample opportunity to register. It's easy to do and full information and fee details are online at www.gov.uk/register-a-boat

Jephson continued:

Our approach to non-registration offences on the Thames has also changed. While we continue to prosecute offenders through our escalation process, we have also begun to remove boats where the owner has previously been prosecuted and continues not to comply. We are currently recruiting more patrol officers to clamp down further. It's time to put pride back into the river.

The task force was established in July 2025 and it removed 35 boats from the Lower Thames over a few days of intensive action in September 2025 and a further 18 this January.

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Notes to Editors

- The Environment Agency is working with partners and riparian landowners to enable them to remove boats as they become a problem, improving the river environment for all.
- The Environment Agency will take proportionate action against those who do not follow the rules and recover costs where it is possible.
- As the task force operation continues, the Environment Agency will be working with the police and Local Authorities to ensure the removals continue smoothly and on schedule.
- Contractors will be supporting with disposal after the operation.
- Over 100 boats have been removed this financial year. 35 in September 2025, 18 in January 2026, 70 planned for March 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-boat-clean-up-in-a-decade-underway-on-upper-thames>