

Statement on Division 1 “Late to the start” penalties.

This year we had to issue a lot of penalties to Division 1 crews for being late to the start. As organisers we have received a selection of feedback, both formal and informal, and, as a result, we feel that it is appropriate to make a public statement about these penalties.

Our Instructions to Competitors clearly state that crews must be in their marshalling position 10 minutes before the race is due to start. In common with other events, we apply a common sense and pragmatic approach to crews that aren't quite in position 10 minutes before race start time however there has to be a point at which we have to stop latecomers from continuing to progress to their marshalling position. If we were to allow latecomers to proceed this prevents the race from starting and penalises crews that have made it to their correct position on time and are now sitting there waiting for something to happen. At regattas crews must be at the start and attached 2 minutes before the race is due to start: crews and coaches are fully aware that at big events, eg those at Dorney, Nottingham and Henley, if they're not at the start on time then there's a very good chance that they'll be excluded from the race. Crews and coaches therefore make sure that they boat in very good time to make sure that they're on time and not having to rush. There shouldn't be a different attitude to arriving on time to the start at a head race.

It was observed that the crews getting the penalties on Saturday were those that were boating from Putney and that the lateness was caused by congestion created by weaker crews struggling with the wind and stream conditions. It is our view that experienced coaches of experienced crews were fully aware of the conditions and that they could easily have analysed that these conditions were highly likely to mean that more time would be needed to get to the start and advanced their boating time by 10-15 minutes.

As it was, Chiswick Bridge was closed to latecomers at 12.55, ie 5 minutes before the scheduled race start time, leaving about 15 Division 1 crews held below the bridge and being issued with penalties.

We don't aim to upset competitors and coaches by pettily issuing penalties, but for the event to be run successfully, crews do need to be in position on time and that does mean that boating needs to take place with less of a “just in time” calculation.