

safety hints for

Towing Sports

Water Skiing, Wake Boarding, Knee Boarding, Inner Tubing



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
THE RESOURCES AGENCY
DIVISION OF BOATING AND WATERWAYS

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Towing Safety

Before heading out to go water skiing, wake boarding or inner tubing, the boat operator, skier, and observer need to learn safe boating skills. Know the boating laws, the fundamentals of the sport, how to use your equipment, and how to work as a team. Following are tips for making sure your day on the water is safe and enjoyable.

Note: In this pamphlet, whether the tow sport under discussion is water skiing, wake boarding, knee boarding or tubing, the term "skier" is used to refer to the person being towed.

The Law

Life Jackets

California law provides that any person being towed behind a vessel must wear a Type I, II, III, or V U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Exceptions: the law does not apply to performers engaged in professional exhibitions, official regattas, marine parades, or tournaments. Any person engaged in slalom skiing on a marked course, or barefoot, jump or trick water skiing, may instead wear a wetsuit designed for the activity and labeled by the manufacturer as a water ski wetsuit. However, for each skier who elects to wear a wetsuit, a Type I, II, III, or V life jacket must also be carried on board. Note: Inflatable personal flotation devices are not approved for use while water skiing, wake boarding, knee boarding or being towed in an inner tube.

Speed Limits

The maximum speed for boats is 5 MPH within 100 ft. of a swimmer, and within 200 ft. of a bathing beach frequented by swimmers, a swimming float, a diving platform or life line, or a passenger landing in use. In addition, there may be local speed ordinances where you go boating. Boats towing skiers must follow all speed limits.

Operator Age

No person under the age of 16 may operate a motorboat of more than 15 horsepower. Exception: the law allows persons 12 - 15 years old to operate a motorboat of more than 15 HP if supervised by a person on board who is at least 18 years of age.

The Observer

California law requires there to be at least two persons aboard a boat towing a skier: the operator, and an observer 12 years of age or older.

Time of Day

Participating in any towing sport is prohibited during the hours from sunset and sunrise.

Reckless Driving

It is illegal to operate or manipulate any vessel, towline, or other device for controlling the water ski, wake board, knee board or similar equipment so as to cause that equipment or the person on it to collide with an object or person.

Towing sports equipment should never be used or operated in a manner so as to endanger the safety of persons or property. Passing the towline over another vessel or skier, or navigating between a vessel and its tow is also prohibited by law.

Ski Flag

Under California law, the display of a ski flag is mandatory to indicate a skier in the water, or a ski, a line, or similar equipment in the immediate area. The display of the ski flag does not in itself restrict the use of the water, but warns boaters operating in the area to exercise caution.

Boaters who see a red or orange flag being displayed should be on the lookout for a skier or equipment in the water.

Alcohol

The use of alcohol plays a significant role in boating accidents and fatalities. It is unlawful to participate in towing sports or to operate a boat under while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Before Beginning to Ski

Local laws may also restrict towing sports at certain times during the day and in certain areas. There may also be local speed restrictions. Know the local rules where you go boating, and find out in advance about any local hazards.

Tips for the Boat Operator

The rules of the road do not provide any special privileges for vessels towing skiers. The safety and welfare of the person you are towing is largely in your hands. There is no room for horseplay within the operator's scope of responsibility. Remember that tubers have no ability to steer and are completely dependent upon you for their safety.

Resist the temptation to turn around and monitor the skier. The observer should be watching to ensure the skier's safety and let you know if problems arise. Keep your focus on your direction of travel and maintain a course that keeps the skier away from other boats, the shoreline, or any other hazards. Many accidents occur because the operator was watching the skier and failed to see hazards ahead.

Be aware that the towline can cut like a knife. Before pulling the skier or boarder up, make sure the towline is not caught in the propeller or wrapped around the person being towed. Never accelerate until the skier is grasping the towline handle, with the ski or board in proper position, and signals readiness to be towed. Ease the throttle at first, slightly increasing your speed to provide smooth acceleration until the skier is up on plane. The boat operator should adjust the boat's speed according to the skier's ability. A good speed for beginners, depending upon weight and ski size, is 18-25 MPH.

Never make sharp turns with the boat, especially if the skier is cutting sharply outside the wake on either side. If an approaching obstacle forces you into an unexpected turn, throttle back as you turn. Signal the turn to the skier, remembering that it is better to dunk the skier than risk an accident.

When a skier falls, the operator should return without delay. Other boaters may not easily see the skier in the water, and the presence of your boat may keep other boats away from the vicinity of your skier. Since many towing-sport injury accidents are the result of improper operation by the driver during skier pick-up, use good safety practices. Approach with caution, from the driver's side, so the skier is always in view and on your side of the boat. NEVER back the boat up to a person in the water. Shut the engine off when the boat nears the skier so there is no danger from the propeller. When the engine is idling, even in neutral, the propeller may still be turning and can injure an unwary skier, or entangle and cut the towline. In addition, anytime the engine is on, carbon monoxide poisoning is a danger. Repeated or prolonged exposure, even in the open air environment, can cause fainting and subsequent drowning. If a skier falls and is injured, proceed with caution. Any injury may be aggravated by trying to pull the person from the water and onto the boat. Get into the water to support the skier until help arrives or the nature of the injury is known.

Tips for the Observer

In addition to relaying the skier's and operator's signals, the observer is responsible for watching the skier at all times. Having an observer (who must be at least 12 years old) on board allows the driver to give full attention to the variety of tasks necessary for safe motorboat operation. This includes maintaining a proper lookout; failure to do so is one of the leading causes of boating accidents.

Tips for the Skier

Be alert for cross-wakes, partially submerged objects, swimmers, rafters, or anything else that might come between you and the boat. The law requires that you wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket at all times while being towed. It will allow you to rest in the water while waiting for the boat, protect the rib cage and cushions falls, and its bright color will help others on the water to spot you. Ski belts are not Coast Guard approved and do not offer positive protection to a fallen or unconscious skier.

If you know you are going to fall, relax. Try to make a smooth water entry. Never fall forward over the top of your skis. You can stop quickly by letting go of the rope, sitting back over your skis, and putting

your hands in the water on either side of your body to increase drag, or resistance. After falling, hold a ski up vertically in the air to warn approaching boats.

Skiing, boarding or tubing in cold water or weather increases your risk of hypothermia, so wear a wetsuit if appropriate.

When finished skiing, make sure all gear is secured in a storage rack or tied down, and all lines are safely stowed. Injuries have resulted from boards falling off racks, tubes blowing overboard, or boat occupants becoming entangled in ski lines.

Signaling

The illustrated signals below, approved by USA Water Ski, are recommended for use on California waters. Others include START: Shout "OK" or "hit it", or nod head. JUMP: Raise hand up sharply, indicating a jumping arc. SLOW: Palm-down motion. FAST: Palm-up motion. RETURN: Pat the top of your head with open palm.



Faster



Slower



Speed O.K.



Stop



Right Turn



Skier O.K. After Fall



Pick Me Up Or
Fallen Skier-Watch Out



Back to Drop-Off Area



Left Turn



Cut Motor

Equipment

Make sure your equipment is in safe, serviceable condition. Foot bindings should be secure and free of sharp or protruding surfaces. Skis made of wood should be free of splinters or cracks in the lamination. Check the towline (handles, lines, and connecting hooks) for serviceability every season. Attach towlines only to proper fittings on the boat. Many skiers have been seriously injured in accidents resulting from the improper use of the tow boat or equipment. A towline in use can cut like a knife. For this reason, when more than one person is skiing, the towlines should be of equal length.

Where to Ski

Minimize the danger of collisions with other boats or skiers, or fixed objects, by staying out of congested areas and heavily traveled lanes. Avoid skiing close to shore, around bends, or in shallow water. Stay out of fishing areas. It is best to scout the area before you ski.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide can collect within, alongside or behind a boat in minutes in a variety of ways. If anyone on board complains of irritated eyes, headache, nausea, weakness or dizziness, immediately move the person to fresh air, investigate the cause and take corrective action. Seek medical attention, if necessary.

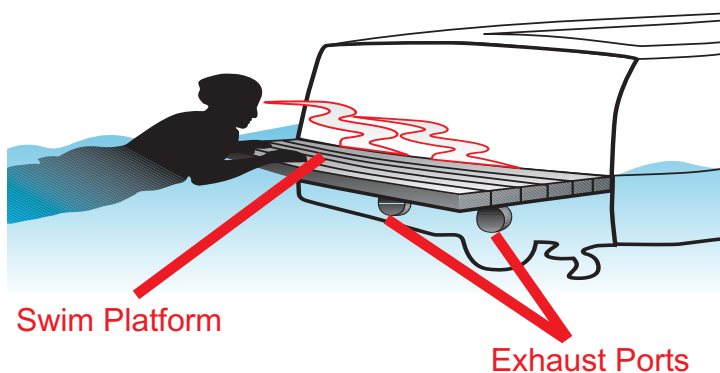
Carbon monoxide is colorless, odorless and tasteless, and mixes evenly with the air. Areas of concern include the rear deck near the swim platform when the engine is running. Regular maintenance and proper boat operation can reduce the risk of injury from carbon monoxide.

Since skiing activities often involve persons being in and around the boat stern, near or on the swimstep, or in the water adjacent to the stern, operators should make sure that the engine is off so that no one is poisoned by the fumes from an idling engine.

Water ski lines are typically long enough to minimize exposure to exhaust fumes, but those who ski on shorter lines risk increased exposure.

In addition, a dangerous practice known as “teak” surfing or drag surfing (clinging to a moving boat’s swim platform till the boat creates a wake and then body surfing the wake) has resulted in deaths from carbon monoxide inhalation.

For a pamphlet and decal on Carbon Monoxide, contact the Department (please see below).



BOATING SAFETY CLASSES explaining required and recommended equipment for small boats and offering training in good seamanship are conducted throughout California by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and certain chapters of the American Red Cross. For information on Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron classes, call (800) SEA-SKIL (732-7545) or (800) 368-5647. Hands-on boating safety courses are also offered at aquatic centers managed by colleges, cities and counties, and other non-profit organizations throughout the state. For a list of organizations affiliated with the Department, see our Website. The Department of Boating and Waterways offers a free home study course entitled *California Boating, A Course for Safe Boating*. For more information, e-mail us at pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov, or call tollfree at (888) 326-2822, or write: California State Parks, Divisions of Boating and Waterways, P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, California 95815-3888. Visit our Website at www.dbw.ca.gov.