
CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE USE OF TOWED INFLATABLE EQUIPMENT

The driving skills required for towing inflatables and other towables are distinctly different from those required for other boat driving activities. Every inflatable rides the water differently and any change in either water or wind condition will have a marked effect on the way a particular inflatable can be towed.

Inflatable equipment includes a variety of designs including 'Ringos', 'tubes', 'Biscuits', 'Sausages', 'Bananas', 'Sledges', and many other trade names. They are all designed to carry one or more riders while being towed along the water.

The whole concept of riding on a towed inflatable is that it is a 'thrill ride' in which the rider attempts to hold on while the craft is towed through various manoeuvres at speed and over wakes. It is inevitable that riders will fall into the water during the activity.

It is therefore essential that if towed inflatable rides are being conducted, robust procedures be in place to ensure that any fallen riders are quickly spotted and safely recovered.

The Driver of the towing craft is responsible for the safety of the riders. To help with this responsibility, there must be a comprehensively briefed Observer in the craft at all times. The Observer must inform the Driver immediately if any rider falls from the inflatable and must then continue to observe them until they are either picked up by the towing craft or have remounted the towed inflatable.

It is important to remember that the riders have no control of the path of the equipment and it must be clearly understood that the boat Driver determines what happens to the equipment. For example when the boat turns sharply the equipment will slide across the water in a manner described as 'on the whip'. If the boat is driven too fast or over water that is too rough, the equipment may dive into the water or capsize.

Serious accidents have occurred because riders of inflatable equipment have been sent into collision with other boats, jetties, or shore banks when Drivers do not allow sufficient turning room. Other accidents have occurred from riders being thrown out at excessive speed.

When there is more than one rider on an inflatable, all riders are strongly advised to wear protective helmets. These should be made of a soft, high visibility material to ensure that a rider who has fallen into the water is clearly seen. Serious injuries have occurred when unprotected heads have banged together during falls.

It is strongly recommended that Drivers of inflatables hold a recognized boat driving qualification. The current basic recommended qualifications are the Boat Master's Licence (BML), the BWSW Ski Boat Driver Level 2, and the RYA Powerboat Level 2. (See BWSW website for Centre's offering training). Higher level qualifications are also available. They should also have received guidance from a Driver experienced in the driving of inflatables.

This information has been developed by BWSW. It is intended to help BWSW clubs manage the use of towed inflatables. Other providers may find this useful and wish to reference this in their procedures.



CHECK LIST FOR THE BOAT DRIVER

GENERAL POINTS

- 1 Always appoint an Observer and ensure that they are comprehensively briefed.
- 2 Always follow the manufacturers recommendations.
- 3 Check the inflatable is in good repair, including the ropes and towing 'eye'.
- 4 Do not overload the equipment with riders.
- 5 Always use a towrope of the type recommended by the manufacturers.
- 6 Check that local rules allow towed inflatables on the water.
- 7 Check the water is clear of floating debris and other obstructions.
- 8 Use standard procedures for crowded waters. These can be found in the BWSW SBD2 syllabus.
- 9 Do not tow an inflatable at night.
- 10 Check that your boat insurance covers inflatable equipment.
- 11 Ensure that the rider(s) is wearing an appropriate ski vest or other buoyancy aid.
- 12 Children should not ride inflatables without permission and advice from the parent or guardian.
- 13 Make sure the rider(s) knows BWSW standard aural and hand signals. (see below)
- 14 Do not start a tow until the rider shouts 'hit it'.

BOAT HANDLING

- 1 Tow in a manner suitable for the water conditions and always execute wide turns.
 - 2 Do not increase speed on turns.
 - 3 If an inflatable goes out on the 'whip', reduce speed.
 - 4 Do not tow an inflatable over the wash of other boats.
 - 5 Do not tow an inflatable over a jump or through a slalom course.
 - 6 Do not use excessive manoeuvres to try to throw the rider out.
 - 7 Keep away from other boats and other water users.
 - 8 Do not tow an inflatable in shallow water.
 - 9 Leave sufficient space to avoid all obstacles, not less than a towropes distance of any solid object.
 - 10 Do not continue a tow if a rider(s) falls.
 - 11 Always approach a fallen rider at an appropriate controlled speed on the Driver's side.
 - 12 Always switch off the engine before boarding riders from the water.
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RULES FOR RIDERS OF INFLATABLES

INFLATABLE RIDERS

- 1 Wear a ski vest or buoyancy aid.
- 2 Wear high-visibility, soft head protection.
- 3 Do not ride an inflatable unless you are confident in the water.
- 4 Know BWSW standard hand and aural signals.
- 5 Do not stand up on the inflatable.
- 6 Do not try to throw other riders overboard.
- 7 Do not attempt to steer an inflatable.
- 8 Do not attempt to abandon an inflatable during a tow.
- 9 Do not hold the towing rope.
- 10 Do not fasten any part of your body to an inflatable.
- 11 Do not shout hit it until the rope is taught and all riders are prepared.
- 12 If a fall takes place, put your hands in the air to indicate 'OK'.

STANDARD SKI SIGNALS:

Aural signals: "In gear" & "Hit it"



FASTER



SLOWER



TURN AROUND



BACK TO DOCK



SPEED OK



SAME SPEED



I'M OK



STOP
