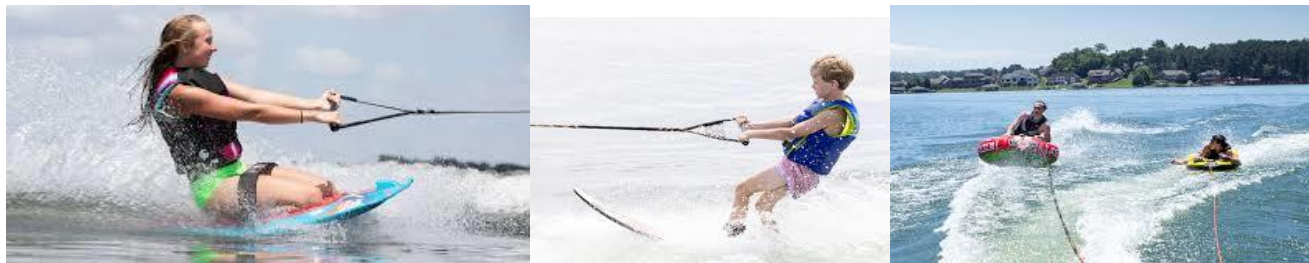
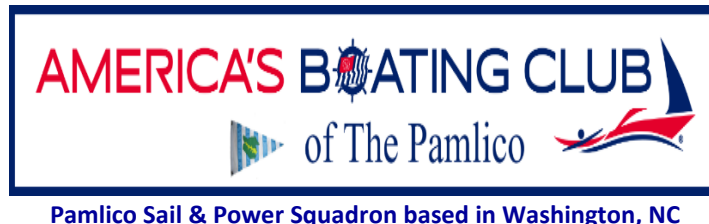


Watersports Towing Safety Tips

Provided by Tom McCluskey, Writer



The recent boating accident on Bath Creek that seriously injured incoming ECU baseball player Parker Byrd from Laurinburg, NC serves as a stark reminder of the importance of adhering to strict towing safety rules while on the water. Our hearts go out to him and his family and friends. Especially this time of year when our waters are warm and mostly free of flotsam that can appear after named storms. Spending the day pulling—and being pulled by—friends and family on the water can be the height of summer fun—provided you follow these time-tested watersports towing safety tips to keep your friends and family safe.

Today, in addition to traditional water skis, boaters can tow an array of recreational watersports devices behind their boats, from wakeboards, wake skates, wake surfers and kneeboards—all with special tow rings and lines—to towable tubes, inflatable rafts and inner tubes. Because of their popularity and variety, towables require extra care and attention in order to be operated safely.

Always have everyone wear appropriately fitted life jackets. Prepare for the unexpected such as towlines coming loose and hidden obstructions both above and below the waterline that can bounce riders around. All towing boats should have a spotter positioned to observe those being towed—facing aft to ensure constant attention and broad field of view. Spotters must keep their heads on a swivel especially when crossing one's own wake (when riders can catch air and fall) or when riders extend outside your wake on tight turns. Remember that towables can and do extend by the entire length of your towline to your port and starboard due to centrifugal force while turning. Take care to anticipate this while watching for oncoming vessels and possible debris far outside your wake.

When piloting your boat back to a separated rider, use a sharp but smooth slow turning arc and bring the towline across to the rider(s), shifting into neutral or cutting the engine altogether as you approach. Never use reverse to approach your rider in the water. If you miss your rider the first time, circle around for another pass. Try to keep the towline tensioned and straight until resuming your tow.

Those being towed should remember that at higher speeds, falling into the water can feel like a very hard surface until you break the water's plane. When being towed by hand, learn how to fall by taking care to let go of the tow line and tucking yourself to avoid falling forward. As a teen, I learned this lesson firsthand and lost my retainer as a result. Let the towline come to you in the water and run through your hands until resumption of your tow. Use hand signals such as thumbs up to signal okay or go—and repeatedly push palms down to the water for a slow or stop signal. Take care to keep safe distance from your towing vessel while maintaining line tension and avoiding towline tangles.

Both those piloting the boat and the individual being towed must be aware of carbon monoxide (CO) fumes in the water astern of a running engine, Concentrations have been measured as high as 27,000

parts per million (ppm) at the stern of boats involved in CO-poisoning fatalities. In comparison, the World Health Organization has set a ceiling limit on a person's exposure to CO at 87 ppm during a 15-minute interval." As outboard motor exhaust is vented directly at the water surface, do not linger in the water astern of any vessel where you may be unseen and subject to elevated CO levels. Most importantly, always stay clear of the prop—even if it is not moving.

So, go out and have fun on the water while observing these common sense rules. Doing so will allow for many hours of safe enjoyment on our beautiful estuarial waters.

This article is given the courtesy of your local America's Boating Club of the Pamlico. Keep us in mind for your boating education and skill building that includes advanced courses as well as 2 - 4 hour seminars. To learn more about our boating courses, email our Education Officer at psps@gmail.com. We invite you to reference our website at <https://pamlicosailandpowersquadron.org> to learn more.