

# Safety Recommendations: An Outline (Boat)



## Introduction

The British Water Ski & Wakeboard Federation Limited ("BWSW") has drawn up some outline recommendations for those who participate in the sport of water skiing and wakeboarding, and, as a checklist, for operators of water ski and wakeboard sites (whether behind the boat or cable). This follows a review with an experienced operator. Safety not only means the safety of those participating in the sport, but also the safety of other water users, general public, spectators etc. These recommendations cannot and are not intended to be more than an outline – not least given the different configuration of every site and the different types of participation offered. Each site must carry out its own specific risk assessment and method statements to ensure safety and maintain up to date safety rules specific to the site and operations at the site. Water skiing and wakeboarding (whether behind a boat or on cable) is a physically arduous sport requiring the participant to have a good level of fitness and no medical issue that precludes participation. This is of course, subject to special arrangements for our much valued adaptive members. For fit and medically sound participants the sport still carries the risk of serious injury and even death. It is imperative therefore that every effort is made to minimise the risk of injury both to participants, site staff and third parties. **These recommendations are subject to all requirements of applicable health and safety legislation.**

All participants should sign a properly drafted acknowledgement of risk and consent form/waiver prior to participation.

These outline recommendations deal with safety in relation to towing behind a boat and do not address insurance cover. There are separate outline safety recommendations for cable. Please see more details on insurance for our voluntary clubs on our website: [www.bsw.org.uk](http://www.bsw.org.uk)

For sites with aqua parks the Royal Life Saving Society runs an approval scheme: [rlss.org.uk/acqua-parks](http://rlss.org.uk/acqua-parks).

## Definitions

"**Skier**" means any person being towed behind a boat as part of the water skiing activities listed below. *Note – Wakeboarders are known as **Riders** but for the purpose of these recommendations ALL participants are referred to as "Skiers" to avoid repetition and also confusion with riders of Inflatable Equipment.*

"**Boat**" means any motorised vessel used to tow a Skier.

"**Inflatable Equipment**" means towed water equipment as shown below.

## The Towing Vessel

Many of these recommendations will apply to the use of '3-seater' personal watercrafts (PWCs) suitable for towing Skiers including in particular provision of a bespoke space for a backward facing observer. BWSW's expertise, as regards its coaching and driver qualifications, does not extend to PWCs as towing vehicles. Users should adhere to the manufacturer's recommendations. The RYA provide a proficiency test ([www.rya.org.uk/training/courses/personal-watercraft-proficiency-course-pwpc](http://www.rya.org.uk/training/courses/personal-watercraft-proficiency-course-pwpc)) and also guidance on the use of PWCs as towing vehicles [link]

PWC can take many different forms, but generally a PWC is a recreational watercraft that the rider sits on or stands on, not within, as in a boat.

These Safety Recommendations should be taken into consideration at all times.

## Water Skiing Activities

**The following activities are all considered to be part of the sport of water skiing:-**

- Water skiing on 2 skis or 1 ski
- Slalom skiing
- Trick skiing
- Jumping

- Wakeboarding
- Wakeskating
- Wakesurfing
- Kneeboarding
- Barefooting
- Water ski racing

Wakesurfing is not covered by these Safety Recommendations. However, many of the provisions of these recommendations will apply but additional safety recommendations relating to Wakesurfing are available separately on the BWSW website – [www.bsw.org.uk](http://www.bsw.org.uk)

### **Inflatable Equipment**

BWSW has also produced guidance in relation to the use of Inflatable Equipment given their use at a number of member sites. Inflatables include;

- Ringos
- Tubes
- Donuts
- Bananas

The use of Inflatable Equipment is covered by the Guidance In Relation To The Use Of Towed Inflatables which BWSW has published as a separate document. The Guidance In Relation To The Use Of Towed Inflatables is available on the BWSW website – [www.bsw.org.uk](http://www.bsw.org.uk).

**ANY POTENTIAL INTERACTION BETWEEN INFLATABLES AND OTHER WATER ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE SUBJECT TO THE SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES REFERRED TO IMMEDIATELY BELOW WITHOUT EXCEPTION.**

### **Safety Protocols and Procedures**

All clubs and centres must ensure their safety procedures and protocols are regularly reviewed (including in the context of the specific configuration on their site) and that their safety procedures and protocols are made abundantly clear to participants. There should be a robust paper trail to evidence this.

In addition, all facilities must carry out and regularly review and update as necessary (including if there is any change at all to the configuration of the site or equipment used at the site) risk assessments in relation to the operation of the site and all equipment used at the site. Risk assessments and actions that are identified through the risk assessment process must be documented.

The above should include a water recovery/rescue plan for an injured Skier including the use of appropriate recovery equipment.

BWSW has a basic template on its website for a risk assessment and has commissioned Atlantic Crest, a third party safety consultant, to produce a template normal operating plan including water recovery which are primarily intended for voluntary clubs. These documents are also available on our website.

**It is the operator's sole responsibility on a day to day basis to ensure all activities are carried out safely at their centres. These safety recommendations are in addition and supplemental to a site's / operator's statutory obligations including all relevant health and safety legislation.**

It is important to note that BWSW does not, and does not purport to, undertake or be responsible for reviewing or monitoring members' sites' ongoing compliance with their operating standards. BWSW does not have the expertise or resources to do that, nor is it what BWSW was established to do.

It does operate an accreditation scheme which is designed for commercial facilities.

### **Ski Boat Driver & Coaching Qualifications**

#### **Ski boat driving courses**

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1. BWSW recommends that all water ski boat drivers acquire a BWSW Ski Boat Driver Qualification (SBD 1, 2 or 3 as appropriate). This qualification and an ICC (International Certificate of Competence) can be gained via courses and tests at centres throughout the UK. Details of your nearest centre can be obtained from the BWSW website – [www.bwsw.org.uk](http://www.bwsw.org.uk).

Novice drivers and drivers in training for an SBD should only be permitted to drive a water ski boat if an experienced driver, holding an SBD, is on board the boat and supervising the activity. BWSW in addition recommends that in any event only drivers with such a qualification give lessons to and tow beginners.

Water Ski facilities should make these qualification recommendations in relation to water ski boat drivers clear, where relevant, to local and harbour authorities with a view to making this a **requirement** for all ski boat drivers operating in areas of water under their authority or supervision.

2. Ski boat drivers should carry a 2-way radio or mobile phone (with adequate reception). On coastal waters a VHF radio should be used.
3. Ski boat drivers should wear a “kill cord” when operating a boat.

The Ski Boat Driver syllabus contains valuable information on safe boat driving for all forms of water skiing. Copies of the syllabus are available from the BWSW website via SBD Principals – [www.bwsw.org.uk](http://www.bwsw.org.uk) . It is important to recognise an SBD relates solely to boat driving and includes no coaching component. As such no first aid training is included. **It is BWSW’s recommendation that if the boat driver or observer does not have such a qualification that there should be someone on site with such a qualification at all times.** Please also see below under First Aid.

## Boat Coaching Course

BWSW also provides coaching courses. All coaching should be carried out by suitably experienced people, and it is BWSW’s recommendation that all coaching outside of incidental advice / informal input is only done by BWSW licensed coaches and this applies in particular to beginners. Please see the BWSW website [www.bwsw.org.uk](http://www.bwsw.org.uk) for more details of our coaching courses. It is recognised that not all coaching course candidates will be starting with the same level of experience and expertise and BWSW will seek to accommodate that in the courses offered to the extent possible. These courses have been developed over the years with the input of experienced commercial and voluntary operators. The following qualifications are available:

1. The Level 1 Coaching Qualification is mainly aimed at volunteers who would like to help out at their club. It is predominantly a qualification to enable a member to coach beginner Skiers. It is aimed at those who are new to coaching water skiing and wakeboarding. On successful completion of the qualification, candidates will be deemed to be qualified to work with beginner Skiers/riders only (subject to obtaining supplementary requirements as stated below).
2. The Level 2 Coaching Qualification is recommended for volunteers that coach regularly at their club and anyone who will be working as a paid coach e.g., for a ski school or holiday company. The qualification is considered to meet the standard for coaching unaccompanied at an advanced level within the sport and is therefore recommended to coaches working with a participant from beginner to advanced. On successful completion of the qualification, candidates will be deemed qualified to coach anywhere in the UK subject to obtaining the supplementary requirements as stated below. The qualification may have recognition in other countries.

**It should be noted that both coaching qualifications have supplementary requirements (which include current first aid, safeguarding and DBS certification). Only those that meet these requirements will be BWSW licenced/qualified coaches.**

## **First Aid**

BWSW will seek to connect BWSW full and associate members with third party providers of first aid courses and strongly recommends that all voluntary clubs encourage all regular users to take up a first aid course (including on the use of AEDs (defibrillators) which are also recommended). All commercial centres will have their particular obligations under health and safety legislation.

## **Further Safety Points:**

1. All water ski boats towing Skiers on public waters and enclosed sites where more than one water ski boat operates or there are additional activities must be occupied by two competent persons (driver and observer) at all times whilst towing. This enables the driver to concentrate on navigation and the water ahead, whilst the observer is responsible for watching the Skier and relaying his signals to the driver. The driver will also be aware of the Skier by using the rear-view mirror.
2. At water ski facilities on sufficiently sized enclosed waters where only one water ski boat operates (with no other on-water activity) at any time and help is readily accessible, it is normally considered to be sufficient for a qualified driver/coach to drive for one Skier without an observer on board **if this is agreed by the relevant boat insurance company**. However, an observer is always required when towing an inflatable, when towing two or more Skiers and when towing a Skier for jump. An observer is often, depending on the circumstances, required for tricks. Water ski facilities are strongly advised to carry out a risk assessment to determine the need for an observer where there is any possibility, however unlikely, of another boat or activity using the water area at the same time or the site, even if used by only one boat, at a time, is in anyway constrained. For beginners it may well make sense even on a single use site for there to be an observer.
3. All boats towing Skiers must be operated in a careful and prudent manner, and at a reasonable distance from persons and property so as not to endanger the life or limb or the property of any person. No person must operate a boat or water ski or wakeboard in a reckless or negligent manner.
4. No boat should be operated in darkness or otherwise in poor visibility.
5. It is imperative that all site operators are able to ensure ready access to their facilities for emergency services in the event of serious injury or incapacity and that the fact of the injury or incapacity can be readily communicated to all relevant parties at the facility and the emergency services. The "Whatthree words" app may provide a good means of showing location. All sites should have a water recovery and emergency action plan for injured or incapacitated Skiers.
6. Drivers must not manoeuvre a boat so as to create the danger of collision or accident for the Skier.
7. No person operating a boat towing a Skier should allow any person to ride or sit on the gunwales or decking of the boat. No one in the boat should stand up whilst it is underway.
8. The Skier must wear a buoyancy device suitable for their level of expertise. It must be noted that the buoyancy device is likely not to have any endorsement by any safety agency as it will have been designed to give mobility and flexibility inconsistent with the protection afforded by an approved life jacket. It is essential that all Skiers are good swimmers accordingly. However, it will be appreciated that in the event of concussion or unconsciousness that the device will not give the protection of a life jacket and drowning could occur. The towing boat should, on coastal waters carry life jackets sufficient for the number of people on board the vessel.

9. It is recommended that all boats carry fire extinguishers and boats with inboard engines must have an automatic fire extinguisher fitted in the engine compartment. In addition, all inboards must have a blower fitted which should be used for approximately 5 minutes before starting the engine and after refuelling.
10. When skiing takes place from a public beach or other area where swimmers and other water users are present, an experienced person should at all times be in charge of skiing operations from the shore and assume responsibility to ensure that all necessary safety precautions are rigidly observed. Take off and landing points must be clearly marked with buoys, ropes or guard boats to indicate these approach areas to other water users. Careful watch should be kept ensuring that swimmers in particular do not enter the danger area. Apart from take-off and landing operations, all normal skiing must be carried out away from the shore at a safe distance beyond areas used by swimmers, pedalos and similar craft. All boats must observe any speed controls in this zoned area.
11. No person should operate a boat towing a Skier within a water area which has been clearly marked by buoys or some other distinguishing device, as a bathing or otherwise restricted area provided that this rule should not apply in case of emergency.
12. Where water skiing takes place on areas of water where rowing or canoeing also take place, wash from ski boats can seriously disturb their activity. In the worst cases wash can swamp or even sink canoes and rowing boats. Water ski boat drivers should stop their boat and allow the rowers and canoeists to pass by with no wash. All Skiers and boat drivers must respect other water users by allowing them to enjoy their activity.
13. REMEMBER water ski zones and the removal of speed limits are created to enable ALL Skiers to enjoy the sport. Skiers should use all water ski zones with respect for both the environment and other users of the area. Skiers should conduct themselves, at all times, in such a way that that all Skiers will be welcomed back.
14. Local byelaws must be observed by all boat drivers, observers and Skiers. Before launching a boat or towing a Skier, all necessary permission must be obtained. On coastal waters, the harbour master should be consulted for any necessary permission to launch and also for information regarding local rules and navigation marks.
15. Please observe the Always and Nevers that come after the Safety Hand Signals section immediately below.
16. On coastal waters all operators should be aware of the International Maritime Regulations for Use in Coastal Waters. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1996/75/contents/made>

## **Safety: Concussion**

On 28 April 2023, the Government and the Sport and Recreation Alliance published the first UK-wide **important** Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport which will help all involved in sport to identify and manage concussion. **These need to be taken on board by all involved in the sport.** <http://sramedia.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/9ced1e1a-5d3b-4871-9209-bff4b2575b46.pdf>

## Safety Hand Signals

(a copy of the Safety Hand Signals is available for reproduction from the BWSW website). These are the recommended safety hand signals:



## Rules for Safe Water Skiing and Wakeboarding behind the boat: some things to be treated as “Always” and “Nevers”

### SKIERS

**ALWAYS** be a good swimmer and confident in the water. Water skiing and wakeboarding is not an appropriate activity for people who are not good swimmers.

**ALWAYS** use approved signals between Skier and observer and driver.

**ALWAYS** let the observer / driver know you are OK as soon as possible after a fall by giving the OK signal. Experienced and competitive Skiers often use a single arm signal to indicate they are OK. Do not use an ok signal before you are sure you are OK.

**ALWAYS** look where you are going and watch the water ahead of you at all times.

**ALWAYS** check your equipment is safe and in good condition and check for wing nuts, loose binding, splinters and sharp metal. Be aware of manufacturer’s warnings as regards your equipment including buoyancy device.

**ALWAYS** ski well clear of solid obstacles - jetties, boats, mooring buoys, rocks, banks etc.

**ALWAYS** let go of the handle on falling.

**ALWAYS** use the best possible buoyancy device suitable for your level of expertise and

be aware of their limitations. Helmets should be worn where appropriate e.g. for jumping. The lack of any third party safety kite mark should be recognised and it must be understood that BWSW is not in a position to (and has not undertaken) any review of the protection afforded by helmets.

**ALWAYS** wear neoprene shorts if not wearing a suitable wetsuit.

**ALWAYS** When you are ready to start, ensure that the ski tips or edge of the board are out of the water and the rope is taut. Use the phrase ‘hit it’ loudly or a similar clear expression which is unlikely to be confused with any other command.

**ALWAYS** remove jewellery. Loss of limbs have occurred as a result of failure to do so.

**TRY TO** recover skis quickly.

**NEVER** wrap rope around any part of your body (fingers, hand or foot).

**NEVER** place any part of the body through the handle (neck, arm or leg).

**NEVER** ski with the handle held in the crook of your arm.

**NEVER** ski in shallow water.

**NEVER** ski under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

**NEVER** ski directly ahead of, or to the side of another boat.

## **SKI BOAT DRIVER**

**ALWAYS** check that the boat safety equipment is working; also, the kill switch (which should be worn at all times) and gear level inhibitors.

**ALWAYS** use the blower for at least five minutes before starting an inboard engine and after refuelling.

**ALWAYS** have a competent observer in the boat when towing a Skier (with the exception of Further Safety Point 2 above).

**ALWAYS** keep control of the tow rope. Do not throw the ski handle directly at the Skier; instead throw it past them or to their side.

**ALWAYS** keep the stern of the boat and the propeller away from the Skier while the engine is running.

**ALWAYS** wait for the Skier's signal and check that their ski tips or edge of the board are above the water before starting.

**ALWAYS** engage forward gear and wait two seconds before adding power progressively. It is the driver's responsibility to decide when to accelerate up to the required skiing speed.

**ALWAYS** keep away from the vicinity of other boats and floating obstacles.

**ALWAYS** keep away from vessels at anchor or on a mooring. Keep well away from a boat flying a blue Alpha Flag or the red and white flag, both indicating a Driver is Down.

**ALWAYS** when skiing in restricted waters stop and allow canoeists and rowers (who are easily swamped) to pass.

**NEVER** attempt fast landing directly towards the shore or dock - sit down if coming in too fast.

**NEVER** ski in unknown waters.

**NEVER** jump from a boat whilst it is moving.

**ALWAYS** give way to sailing boats.

**ALWAYS** (subject to the Further Safety Point 2 above) have a competent observer who must be briefed by the driver to relay signals from the Skier and assist the driver in an emergency.

**ALWAYS** shut off your motor before taking aboard a Skier.

**ALWAYS** return immediately to pick up a fallen Skier. On coastal waters, position the boat between the Skier and other vessels.

**NEVER** turn sharply and put the Skier in the water or on the whip - gradual wide turns are the rule.

**NEVER** drive the boat through swimming or restricted areas.

**NEVER** operate the boat sitting on the side, always sit in the seat.

**NEVER** allow any passenger to get out of a boat unless the boat is stationary.

**NEVER** put the boat into reverse when a Skier is in the water behind the boat.

**NEVER** permit a passenger to stand up whilst the boat is in motion.

**NEVER** drag an injured Skier over the gunwales or decking until you are satisfied that they are fit to do so, and no further injury could occur. The requirements of a water recovery plan should be followed.

**NEVER** operate a boat if under the influence of drugs or alcohol.