



Conway Yacht Club

Towing SOP

Version	Date	Author	Change
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1. Purpose

To ensure the safe, efficient, and consistent towing of small craft during club activities, training sessions, and regattas. This SOP aims to minimise risk to sailors, volunteers, and equipment while maintaining high standards of seamanship.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to:

- Club launch (Siôr) coxes and crews
- Race management teams
- Instructors and assistant instructors
- Any volunteer authorised to operate a club powerboat

It covers towing during:

- Training sessions
 - Racing and regattas
 - Recovery in adverse weather
 - Emergency situations
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3. Responsibilities

3.1 Captain of Sailing / Race Officer / Officer of the Day

- Ensures towing procedures are followed
- Confirms safety boats are appropriately crewed and equipped
- Assesses conditions and authorises towing when required

3.2 Safety Boat Helm

- Has final responsibility for the tow
 - Conducts risk assessment before towing
 - Briefs crew and sailors being towed
 - Selects appropriate towing method
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3.3 Safety Boat Crew

- Assists with rigging towlines
- Monitors the tow throughout
- Communicates with sailors

3.4 Sailors Being Towed

- Follow instructions from safety boat crew
 - Maintain safe positions in their boats
 - Keep hands, feet, and sheets clear of towlines
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4. Pre-Tow Assessment

Before initiating a tow, the launch helm must consider:

- **Weather and sea state** (wind strength, wave height, tide)
- **Distance to be travelled**
- **Number and type of boats** (single-handers, double-handers, foiling dinghies, etc.)
- **Condition of boats** (damaged, capsized, dismasted)
- **Crew competence**
- **Available safety boats**

If conditions exceed safe towing limits, escalate to the Officer of the Day.

5. Equipment Required

The Launch will carry:

- Floating towline (minimum 10–15m)
 - Secondary short tow strop
 - Bridle
 - Knife readily accessible
 - VHF radio
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- First aid kit
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6. Towing Methods

6.1 Single Tow (One Boat)

Used for short distances or when a boat is damaged.

Procedure:

- Attach towline to the sampson post / mooring bollard on CODs or around (never to the horse).
 - Keep towline length sufficient to avoid snatching.
 - Maintain slow, steady speed (typically 4–6 knots depending on sea state).
 - Brief sailor to steer gently and keep boat upright.
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6.2 Multiple Tow (Daisy Chain)

Used for recovering fleets efficiently.

Procedure:

- First COD attaches to launch towline.
 - Towline from each subsequent COD should be attached around mast or to Sampson post on foredeck and not to the horse on the after deck.
 - Ensure lines are short enough to prevent collisions but long enough to avoid entanglement.
 - Maximum recommended: **3 boats per tow**, depending on conditions and boat types.
 - Maintain low speed and wide turns.
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6.3 Alongside Tow

Used for damaged, swamped, or unmanned boats.

Procedure:

- Bring COD alongside launch
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- Launch stern should be aft of COD stern.
 - Secure 1. Bowline 2. Forward spring; 3. Stern spring.
 - Helm keeps COD on windward side where possible.
 - Helm on towing boat and towed must maintain good communication at all times.
 - The helm on the towed boat must mirror all steering on the towed boat.
 - Proceed at minimal speed.
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6.4 Towing a Dismasted Boat

- Secure mast inside hull or alongside.
 - Check that no lines are in the water that could foul the propeller
 - Avoid towing at speed to prevent structural damage.
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7. Communication Protocols

- Use VHF rather than voice where possible
 - Use VHF to inform Race Control:
“Safety Boat 1 commencing tow of X boats from [location] to [destination].”
 - Maintain radio contact during long tows.
 - Inform Race Control when tow is complete.
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8. Safety Considerations

- Keep towline clear of propeller.
 - Avoid sudden acceleration or sharp turns.
 - Monitor for signs of distress or hypothermia in sailors.
 - Maintain lookout for other water users.
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9. Post-Tow Actions

- Ensure all sailors are accounted for and safe.
 - Check COD for damage.
 - Coil and stow towlines properly.
 - Report any incidents, equipment failures, or near misses to Safety Officer.
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10. Emergency Towing

In emergencies (injury, equipment failure, extreme weather):

- Prioritise **people over boats**.
 - Recover sailors to safety boat first if required.
 - Abandon boats only if necessary and report location to Race Control.
 - Use fastest safe towing method.
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11. Training & Competency

- All launch helms must hold **RYA Powerboat Level 2** or equivalent.
- Crews should receive annual refresher training in towing techniques.
- New volunteers must be supervised until competent.