

# Newspaper Article 19: Recreational Sport Towing

One of the practices I see on Lake Thurmond is the towing of persons on skis, boards and inflatable tubes. Just did it myself with my grandchildren last weekend. It was fun for me and of major fun for them.

Since this sport is widespread and will probably increase, now is a good time to look at the safety issues and legal regulations.

Both Georgia and South Carolina have laws that specifically address the sport. The laws of both states are mostly the same, so let's look at their similarities and differences.

It is illegal to tow anyone between sunset and sunrise – no night operations! It is even more illegal – if there is such a thing – to operate the towing vessel or be on the pulled device when under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Every boat or personal water craft (PWC) towing anyone on any type device must have another person on board, in addition to the operator, who will act as an observer. In South Carolina, in lieu of such observer, the towing vessel must have a wide-angled rear view mirror from which to observe the towed person(s). In Georgia, mirrors are not permitted as replacements for an observer

The towing vessel must also have room for the towed person(s) to sit when not being towed. This is particularly important when using a PWC for towing. In South Carolina, if mirrors are used instead of an observer, then a two-seat PWC works. If no mirrors are used but rather another person is acting as observer, then the PWC must have at least three seats- one for the operator, one for the observer and one for the person being towed. If more than one person is being towed, well, then the PWC just has to get bigger and bigger! In Georgia the PWC must have at least three seats as mirrors may not replace an observer.

In both states, the person being towed, must be wearing a Coast Guard approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device (PFD) – that's fancy talk for a life jacket. The life jackets must be properly fitted and fastened.

When towing a person at speed, it is wise to purchase and wear life jackets that are rated to stay on at various speeds. Some are rated at 30 MPH and some higher.

In South Carolina the towing boat and person being towed must maintain a reasonable distance away from other boats, people and property so as to not endanger life or property.

In Georgia it is a little bit more specific in that you must stay at least 100 feet from a vessel not underway or adrift, a dock or pier, a bridge, a person in the water, a shoreline adjacent to a residence, a public park, or beach, a swimming area, a marina, a restaurant, or any other public use area. Follow the Georgia law and you will not have to worry which state you are in.

As captain of the towing vessel, it is important to know that you are the captain of the whole lash up. If either the towing boat or the person being towed causes injury or property damage, you are the responsibly party!

We take on added responsibility to participate in this sport. Just be aware of that and let your actions relate to your responsibility.