

Coaching Tip of the Month: Need a Tow?

By Jennifer H. Yearley

BCU Advanced Sea Kayak Leader
ACA L4 Open Water Coastal Kayak Instructor



A tow system is a fundamental piece of safety equipment in sea kayaking. For anyone who paddles regularly with others, this equipment provides an important insurance policy that everyone in the group will make it back safely, even if a member of the group gets injured, gets sick, or over-extends and finds themselves unable to contend with the conditions, such as an afternoon wind that has kicked up stronger than expected. Tow systems provide an important way we can look after each other out on the water, and anyone who paddles regularly with other people ought to have one and learn how to use it.

At the most basic level, the classic sea kayak tow system will involve, at a minimum, some sort of bag with a belt that can be fastened around the waist, and which stores a length of rope with a carabiner on the end. Rope lengths in classic sea kayak tow systems are variable, but will typically range somewhere between

30 feet and 50 feet. Why so much? The answer is to be able to accommodate towing in rough water, especially following seas. In a following sea, the direction of the waves/swell you are paddling through is the same as the heading of your boat. With a short line in a following sea, the person being towed can easily be picked up by waves and surfed right into the tower, presenting a significant hazard. I personally used to use a 17 foot line as my go-to tow length, but it took just one towing practice session in a following sea for me to move a longer tow system (35 feet), having narrowly avoided seriously injuring or being injured by the friends with whom I was practicing that day. Short lines have their advantages, but when towing in rough water, particularly with a following sea, a longer line is unquestionably the safer answer.

For any tow system, long or short, a key factor is learning the features of the equipment and how to deploy and release it cleanly and efficiently well in advance of actually needing to use it. There are many different types of tow systems and towing configurations, from a simple single person long line tow, to in-line rafted tows, to anchor tows, to the many variations of contact tows, and there is a wide variety of towing equipment available to provide ways to contend with these configurations and others. For a more comprehensive hands-on introduction to a variety of different tow systems and practice with their application in scenarios out on the water, continue taking a [class](#) where this is a focus!

Links to further information some specific tow systems:

<https://northwater.com/collections/tow-lines-throw-lines/products/micro-tow-line>

<https://northwater.com/collections/tow-lines-throw-lines/products/dynamic-tow-line-pro>

<https://northwater.com/collections/tow-lines-throw-lines/products/sea-tec-tow-line>

<https://northwater.com/collections/tow-lines-throw-lines/products/contact-tow>

All these items can be purchased or ordered from [California Canoe & Kayak](#).
Please support your local paddlesports retailer!

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