



Anchoring Safety Tips

Sea Tow Captains Offer Advice on How to Drop the Hook

Sea Tow Captains typically assist boats that are anchored—much too often, improperly. Improper anchoring can lead to problems ranging from the annoying to life-threatening, but with a little planning any boater of average skills can anchor like a pro.

Here's a look at what Sea Tow Captains advise when preparing to anchor a boat during the boating season.

Let out enough anchor rode

Not letting out enough anchor rode (in nautical terms rode is synonymous with the line/chain combination connecting the anchor to the boat) is one of the most common anchoring errors. The common rule of thumb is 5 to 7 feet of rode for every 1 foot of water depth, or a 5-to-1 or 7-to-1 ratio. Some captains go to a 10-to-1 ratio just to be sure or in elevated sea and wind conditions.

"You can never fail with too much anchor line," said Capt. Gary O'Reilly, owner of Sea Tow North Chesapeake out of Galena, M.D. "Too little line out hurts—a lot just compensates and makes the anchor hold better. During one storm I let out 300 feet of anchor line." There is an old saying, "when in doubt, let it out!"

Rode of three-strand nylon is often the choice for smaller boats, while a combination rode of galvanized-steel chain connected to the anchor, and then three-strand nylon connected to the boat, is also popular. Larger boats usually utilize an all-chain rode connected to a windlass.

Don't skimp on anchor line

Another common problem is having a large anchor locker, a good anchor and only 50 feet of rode.

"Our bay is only 5 feet deep, and some people will have only 40 or 50 total feet of anchor line," said Capt. Ryan Bayley, owner of Sea Tow Great South Bay in Oakdale on Long Island, N.Y. "So what happens to them if they go to Fire Island and anchor in 50 feet of water? They really need 350 feet of anchor line. It's a place they don't normally take their boat, for example, and now they have a problem."

Having plenty of rode ensures you'll be covered in deep water, and also gives you a great backup of line in case there is an emergency, where you need to tie off or where extra line would be helpful.

Also, make sure the bitter end of the anchor line is tied off in the anchor locker, or fixed to cleat so it doesn't pay out with the anchor, and away from the boat.

Have a spare anchor

Boats with a windlass should carry a backup anchor that can be used if the windlass

gets jammed.

“If something happens with a windlass or you don’t know how to use the emergency release, there’s a problem,” said Capt. Bayley. “With a backup anchor you are covered. It could be your No. 1 piece of safety equipment.”

Have the right type of anchor

From claws to plows to flukes to wings, there are many different types of anchors for different sea-bottom types and usages.

The claw works well on bottoms like mud, sand, grass and rock, but doesn’t penetrate hard surfaces like clay as well. The three-claw design allows it to set and reset easily, but its holding power is less than a wing anchor.

Plows and wings are similar, with the plow having a hinge and the wings are one piece. Plows and wings hold well on most bottoms, and are the least effective in rock.

Fluke anchors are a common choice and work great in sand and mud, but struggle on other bottoms. They stow easy and may be the most popular style of anchor.

Other anchor styles include a grapnel for smaller boats, and the relatively new plow anchors with roll bars.

Most anchors are made of either steel, stainless steel or aluminum.

Know your knots

Sea Tow captains keep their knives sharp, because they know some boaters tie knots that are impossible to loosen.

“It gets so bad you have to cut them,” Capt. O’Reilly said. Ensure before you tie your anchor line off to a cleat that you take a full round turn around the base of the cleat and then do a couple figure eight’s before you place the final weather hitch. This will ensure you can get the anchor line off the cleat when you need to.

Additionally, if your windlass fails or you must cut your anchor line or chain due to current or weather, have a plan to tie a fender to it so you can come back later and try to retrieve your anchor.

Stern/double anchoring

Boats should almost always be anchored off the bow, but there are times when a stern anchor is used. Or, in other cases a bow and a stern anchor are dropped.

“Make sure you know what you’re doing—anchoring off the stern is not recommended,” Capt. O’Reilly said. “For fishing you might do it for specific reasons, but one good wave on an 18-foot boat anchored from the stern and you could be sunk.”

Sometimes the wind or tide can drag the anchor, even with the proper size and setup. The anchor may come lose with the change in direction.

Here’s the case for two anchors deployed in a V off the bow. If one drags the other will likely stay tight, and in extreme conditions, a third anchor set down the middle of the V can be used.

In general, when choosing an anchoring spot select an area that offers maximum shelter from wind, current and boat traffic, along with the best bottom type for your anchor

Swing away

Give your boat plenty of room to swing around within its own circle due to wind and tide. If a boat pulls into the area where you might swing, take notice, let them know, or

simply move for safety's sake.

"Move if you think there's any chance that another boat is going to swing into you," Capt. O'Reilly said. "It's better to be safe than sorry if you're out swimming or snorkeling, and the wind changes, and the boat swings around into another boat."

About Sea Tow

Sea Tow Services International Inc. is the nation's leading on-water assistance provider for boaters. Established in 1983 by Founder Capt. Joe Frohnhofer, Sea Tow serves members inland to the coast throughout the United States, Europe, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. For a full list of membership benefits, how to become a Sea Tow member or to inquire about becoming a Sea Tow franchise owner, please visit seatow.com. Sea Tow also offers free boating safety information including the Sea Tow App for smartphones, Sea Tow's Automated Radio Check Service, and the nonprofit Sea Tow Foundation's Life Jacket Loaner Station program. For more information, visit seatow.com and boatingsafety.com.

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