

Golden Rules for Conventional Ship Assist Towage

SAFETY BULLETIN

Golden Rules for Conventional Ship Assist Towage

Golden Rules for Conventional Ship Assist Towage

To promote safe and efficient towage operations within the Port of London, the following Golden Rules for conventional towage are now in effect. These guidelines reflect local best practices and are intended to support clear communication, proper planning, and coordinated execution between vessels, pilots, and tug crews.

All parties involved in towage are expected to adhere to these principles, as well as all other industry best practices, to ensure consistent safety standards across all movements.

1. Use the Right Tug for the Right Job

Each tug's capabilities and limitations must be considered individually, particularly conventional tugs, which are more vulnerable to girting and require caution during certain manoeuvres. The appropriateness of gob ropes should be considered by the tug master.

- When multiple tugs are involved, their positioning must be planned to avoid conflict and ensure coordinated force. Care should be taken to prevent a conventional tug from being overpowered by a larger unit.
- Where practicable, pilots and tug master's should discuss the intended manoeuvre and any known tug limitations in advance before boarding the vessel.

2. Communicate and Understand Limitations

- The towage plan must be discussed as part of the **Pilot/Master Exchange**.
- A **Pilot/Tug Master Exchange** must take place to ensure all parties understand each other's roles, the intended manoeuvre and any limitations.
- Standard VHF protocols should be used and all instructions clearly confirmed.

Telephone calls, VHF radio traffic, CCTV and radar traffic images may be recorded in the VTS Centre



Golden Rules for Conventional Ship Assist Towage

SAFETY BULLETIN

- Where possible, an initial Pilot/Tug Master exchange should take place up to 24 hours prior to the pilot boarding the vessel. This allows the pilot to plan effectively, considering the tug's characteristics and limitations. This exchange is supplementary and does not replace the mandatory Pilot/Tug Master exchange conducted during the operation.

3. Control Speed Through the Water

The Master/Pilot must discuss safe speed with the Tug Master and ensure the vessel's speed does not exceed this. Excessive speed is a major factor in tug-related incidents, especially girting and this speed will vary from tug to tug.

4. Avoid Over- or Under-Allocation

The correct number of tugs should be assigned to the task — no more, no less. Over-allocation can create confusion and risk; under-allocation can compromise control and safety.

5. Review and Learn

After each operation, all parties should conduct a hot debrief to assess performance and coordination. Lessons learned should be identified to improve future safety and teamwork.

Where an incident or near-miss occurs, this should be reported to the Harbourmaster in line with Thames Byelaw 8.

Telephone calls, VHF radio traffic, CCTV and radar traffic images may be recorded in the VTS Centre

