General Guidelines for Rafting

1. Rafting

Rafting is the descent of flowing waters in officially inspected inflatable boats that can carry several people (at least 2 side by side). Specific techniques and equipment are required depending on the water level and riverbed.

For the navigation of waters with **raft constructions**, these guidelines apply as minimum standards. Because these craft are harder to steer, stricter safety precautions are usually necessary.

2. Purpose of the guidelines

The guidelines set out the requirements for running commercial rafting trips and govern the training of full-time and part-time raft guides at different levels. They also regulate how nature and the environment are treated.

The guidelines thus also enable untrained tourists to go rafting properly equipped, under expert leadership and in an orderly setting with the greatest possible safety.

Terms used in these guidelines such as leader, guide, operator etc. refer to persons of all genders.

3. Classification of rafting trips by difficulty grade

Whitewater trips are classified by difficulty grade as follows (according to the Swiss Canoe Federation):

- Grade 1 easy
- Grade 2 moderately difficult
- Grade 3 difficult
- Grade 4 very difficult
- Grade 5 extremely difficult
- Grade 6 limit of navigability (not navigable by raft)

The classification by difficulty grade assumes normal conditions. Increased water flow, for example during snowmelt, thunderstorms or reservoir releases, can change the difficulty grade significantly within a very short time.

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4. Training and further training of raft guides

1. The following levels of rafting guide training are distinguished:

- SOA River Rafting Guide 1: assistant / boat leader up to difficulty grade WW III
- SOA River Rafting Guide 2: boat leader for higher difficulty grades
- SOA Tripleader: boat leader responsible for a convoy (regardless of difficulty grade)

2. The structure of the training, the admission requirements and the training content are set out in the Rafting Training Guidelines (see appendix).

3. Raft guides must undertake further training regularly. This is to maintain the level of knowledge and skills acquired and adapt it to new developments.

4. Since 1 May 2019, under the RiskV, FOSPO (BASPO) decides on the recognition of training courses and the classification of guides according to section 4.1.

5. Rights and duties of raft guides

1. River Rafting Guides 1 are entitled to lead a raft with customers (untrained crew) in a convoy and under the supervision of Tripleaders on waters they know, up to difficulty grade WW III.

2. River Rafting Guides 2 are entitled to lead a raft with customers (untrained crew) in a convoy and under the supervision of Tripleaders on waters they know, up to difficulty grade WW V.

3. Tripleaders (TL) are entitled to prepare and run a rafting trip. They are responsible for their own boat and share responsibility for the convoy (maximum 5 rafts).

a. Depending on aptitude, training and professional experience, TLs trained as River Rafting Guide 1 may lead a convoy on whitewater I and II; together with a valid river rescue course (Rescue 3 WRT or similar, max. 3 years old) and good practical knowledge of the river in question, also on whitewater III.

b. Depending on aptitude, training and professional experience, TLs trained as River Rafting Guide 2 may lead a convoy on whitewater I to V.

c. In all cases, one Tripleader must be deployed per 5 rafts.

6. Rights and duties of operators

1. An operator is anyone who decides to run rafting trips, advertises them, makes the necessary preparations, determines the schedule, deploys the responsible raft guides and is in charge of the organisation.

2. Anyone acting as an operator must employ a River Rafting Guide 2 as technical manager or hold the corresponding qualification themselves.

3. Operators and responsible rafting guides have the following tasks:

- Selecting the waters for rafting trips
- Obtaining the necessary permits in accordance with cantonal and national legislation
- Using officially inspected rafts in accordance with legal provisions, and equipment in accordance with industry standards
- Selecting and, where necessary, training the raft guides deployed
- Reconnaissance, including determining the put-in and take-out points
- Setting the meeting points, including parking for participants
- Checking the meteorological and hydrological conditions
- Establishing a safety plan
- Respect for nature and the environment when organising and running rafting trips
- Taking out the necessary insurance for the company, the rafts and the raft guides.
- Instructing participants and equipping them appropriately for the situation
- Briefing, including information on the risks of the planned trip and the requirements for participants
- Deciding on special measures adapted to the situation (safety kayaker, safety support vehicle, 2 guides per raft etc.)
- Deciding whether the trip goes ahead

7. Requirements for participants in rafting trips

1. Rafting requires participants to be in good health. People with health problems should seek medical advice or refrain from rafting trips.

The operator is entitled to have participants confirm in writing that they meet these requirements.

2. Participants must take out their own accident insurance.

3. Participants in rafting trips must follow the instructions of the operator and the raft guides.

4. After being briefed on the risks of the trip, every participant in a planned rafting trip is entitled to withdraw from the contract with the raft guide or operator. This must be stated in the terms and conditions.

5. Once the trip has started, leaving it is only possible with due regard for the prevailing conditions and the other members of the group.

6. The operator is entitled to exclude a person from taking part if there is reasonable suspicion that the person is not in an appropriate physical or mental condition (e.g. under the influence of alcohol or other drugs).

8. Equipment of participants and boat leaders

1. Every person on board a raft wears the following equipment:

- A well-fitting buoyancy aid in accordance with Article 134a of the Inland Navigation Ordinance (standard EN ISO 12402-5:2006)
- A well-fitting water sports helmet (from WW III***) in accordance with standard EN 1385
- Thermal protection suit (from WW III*** or at water temperatures below 15 degrees Celsius)
- A paddle for every person actively rafting

2. Every boat leader must carry the following equipment:

- Buoyancy aid with rescue harness in accordance with standard EN ISO 12402-6:2006
- Water sports helmet EN 1385 from WW III***
- Thermal protection suit from WW III*** or at water temperatures below 15 degrees Celsius
- Rescue knife
- Flip line (at least 4 m long)
- Whistle

*** Because the classification of waters into WW grades depends on various factors which, among other things, are subject to daily and seasonal changes, every boat leader/Tripleader must find out about the water before setting off and choose suitable equipment for all boat occupants adapted to the circumstances. The whitewater difficulty grades are set out in Annex 3 of the Risk Activities Ordinance of 30 November 2012.

9. Safety plan and rescue

1. Every raft guide knows the safety plan for the water to be run and has taken the planned measures (preliminary checks, equipment, information).

2. Every raft guide is entitled to end the descent at the nearest take-out point if difficulties arise.

3. Every raft must carry a throw bag with at least 20 m of floating rope (minimum diameter 8 mm).

4. Every convoy carries a waterproof first aid kit and any further rescue equipment required by the situation. Raft guides administer first aid in the event of accidents.

5. The responsible raft guide/Tripleader decides whether outside help is to be requested (air rescue, doctor, hospital). The legitimate wishes of an injured person are to be taken into account.

6. In the event of an accident, the operator must be notified as quickly as possible.

7. In the event of serious accidents, the operator or the responsible raft guide (Tripleader or a guide appointed by them) notifies the police.

10. Construction requirements for rafts

1. The bow and stern of a raft must be curved upwards. The side tubes of a closed raft must be welded, firmly glued or joined in a comparable way at the bow and stern. The construction of the raft must ensure sufficient strength and manoeuvrability.

2. Fittings in the raft must be designed so that they cannot damage the hull or the air chambers.

3. Rafts must have a number of independent air chambers appropriate to their length (→ min. 6 air chambers)

4. Rafts longer than 4.50 m must have at least two thwarts firmly attached to the side tubes. Other fittings that ensure sufficient strength may be recognised.

5. Heavily stressed and particularly vulnerable parts of a raft, such as the sides or the underside of the side tubes, must be reinforced.

6. If a raft is fitted with a self-bailing system, it must quickly drain incoming water regardless of the direction of travel of the boat.

7. A tightly tensioned safety line running around the entire raft must be fitted on the outside of every raft.

8. The bow and stern of the raft must have fittings for attaching mooring or recovery lines. At least one 5 m long stern or bow line must be attached to every raft.

9. Two handholds must be provided for each permitted person, at least one of them as a foot hold on the floor. They must be designed to prevent slipping through or getting caught.

10. The permitted number of persons is based on the manufacturer's specifications. However, it may not exceed the number calculated under BSV Annex 18 section 1 letter c by more than 1.

11. The permitted number of persons and the boat number must be clearly marked on board.

12. A type plate with details of the manufacturer, year of manufacture, serial number, boat type and nominal pressure of the air chambers must be attached to the boat.

11. Nature and the environment

1. Operators and raft guides protect nature and the environment. They work together with nature and environmental protection organisations. In particular, they ensure environmentally friendly put-ins and take-outs on the waters used, considerate behaviour towards nature along the way and good relations with riverside landowners and other river users.

2. Operators and raft guides promote rafting participants' understanding of nature and the environment through good organisation and targeted organisational measures.

12. Further development of the guidelines

1. These guidelines were drawn up in 2006 by the Swiss Rafting Expert Commission SFKR, which was made up of representatives of the Swiss Outdoor Association (SOA), the Swiss Trend Sports Association (STV) and FOSPO (BASPO).

2. Since the merger of SOA and STV in 2009, these guidelines have been reviewed periodically by the SOA and adapted where necessary.

3. Operators who run convoys on WW 3 and above must assign technical management to a Guide 2 / Tripleader Rafting unless they hold the corresponding qualification themselves. Guide 2s trained in 2003 and 2004 hold the TL qualification. Since 2005, the Tripleader qualification has had to be obtained in a separate module.

4. These guidelines were revised in 2016.

5. These guidelines were amended in 2019.

6. These guidelines were revised in 2021.

7. Points 8.1/8.2/9.3/9.4/10.10/10.11/10.12 correspond to the current BSV ordinance and therefore have the force of law.

8. Stricter legal provisions of the cantons and the Confederation for commercial rafting remain reserved

Appendix 1:

Rafting guide training: structure (summary of the training guidelines)

Level	Title	Training goal	Prerequisites	Training	Exam
1	**River Rafting Guide 1**	**The River Rafting Guide 1 is able** to lead a raft with customers (untrained crew) up to whitewater 3 in a convoy with other boats and under the leadership of a Tripleader. They are able to follow the line agreed in advance and take responsibility for leading their own boat.	Proof of competence: - The candidate keeps a training record and a logbook. Exam prerequisites for candidates: - in their 19th year of age - recommendation from a trainer, not older than 2 years - first aid and CPR certificate (or equivalent training) held - proof of accident insurance	- Training lasts at least 10 course days plus at least 5 assistant runs as a trainee. - Training can be offered by companies or associations. - Training can also be provided in-house by the people responsible for training.	- The module exam is conducted by independent experts in accordance with the SOA guidelines. - It comprises a theory part and a practical part and lasts at least 1 day.
2	**River Rafting Guide 2**	The **Raft Guide 2** is able to lead a raft with customers up to whitewater 5 in a convoy with other boats and under the leadership of a Tripleader. They are able to follow the line agreed in advance and take responsibility for leading their own boat.	Proof of competence: - The candidate keeps a logbook in which all commercial trips, training trips and further training are recorded. Exam prerequisites for candidates: - 30 days of professional experience	- Training can be offered by companies or associations. - Training can also be provided in-house by the people responsible for training.	- The module exam is conducted by independent experts in accordance with the SOA guidelines. - It comprises a theory part and a practical part and lasts at least 1 day.

		They have good knowledge of rescue measures under difficult conditions and can initiate and carry them out as the situation requires.	- Trained in all content according to the requirements profile - first aid and CPR certificate (or equivalent training) held - proof of accident insurance - Proof of a valid river rescue course (WRT Rescue 3 or similar)		
TL	**Tripleader**	Tripleader training is offered by the SOA in a separate module, which covers all activities and is therefore not described in detail here. River rafting guides can be deployed as Tripleaders as follows: • **Up to WW II:** River Rafting Guide 1 plus Tripleader qualification • **WW III:** River Rafting Guide 2 plus Tripleader qualification OR River Rafting Guide 1 plus Tripleader qualification AND a valid river rescue course (Rescue 3 WRT or similar, max. 3 years old) AND good practical knowledge of the river in question • **Above WW III:** River Rafting Guide 2 plus Tripleader qualification			

Training and exam content:

The training and exam content is set out in the following Swiss Outdoor Association documents:

- Requirements Profile River Rafting Guide 1

- Requirements Profile River Rafting Guide 2