

Tether Update: West Marine with Kong is King

West Marine's recently re-designed safety tethers were not available for our January 2007 harness review, but since then, testers were able to evaluate one of the new tethers. WM claims these are stronger, lighter, less expensive, more visible, and easier to open than other currently available tethers.

The tether *PS* testers reviewed is the new, 6-foot, ISAF-approved, elastic tether. Its most noticeable feature is the Kong Tango 715 snap hook at the boat end of the tether. (The user end of the tether has a quick-release snap shackle.) The Series 7000 anodized-aluminum snap hook is ultra strong and rated by the National Fire Protection Association at 7,400 pounds breaking strength. The hook weighs 110 grams, less than most stainless hooks. By depressing the hook's locking device with your thumb, the Kong Tango opens easily with cold or gloved hands—and no pinched skin.

Fluorescent yellow webbing is stitched through an opening in the Kong hook. The stitching includes a doubled-over, sacrificial "shock absorber"/stress indicator that gives way when the tether is overloaded. The stress indicator, an orange flag, signals that it is time to buy a new tether. This feature, which most tethers do not offer, satisfies ISAF. The new tether is elasticized, so when it is relaxed, it is one-third shorter than standard tethers.

Overall, the ISAF-approved tether weighs 0.7 pounds—that's about 5 ounces lighter than the tethers tested for the January review.

In *PS*'s dynamic testing, the WM Kong tethers were attached to a 155-pound "dummy" that was dropped 3 feet and then 6 feet to cement. During both test drops, the stress indicator's stitching gave way as designed, and the tether survived the loaded fall with no damage.

The only knock *PS* has against these new tethers is that the large size of the Kong Tango snap hook means that it can potentially bind when rotated about a small, fixed or folding padeye.

Bottom Line: The added safety features and the lightweight yet strong Kong Tango hook move the new WM tether to the head of the class. It gets the Best Choice nod. We still recommend the Plastimo 6-foot, elastic tether with Gibb hooks and the 6-foot West Marine tethers, with the Gibb and with the Wichard hooks.

We don't know what these new tethers will cost, but WM said they should be on store shelves by this month. The new line will include children's and adult tethers with a double-action, stainless steel safety snap at the boat end, but without the overload indicator stitching.



To test the new West Marine tether's strength and stress indicator, PS attached it to a 155-pound weight (above) and dropped it (below). It maintained its integrity, and the indicator popped open as designed (inset).



BEFORE

AFTER