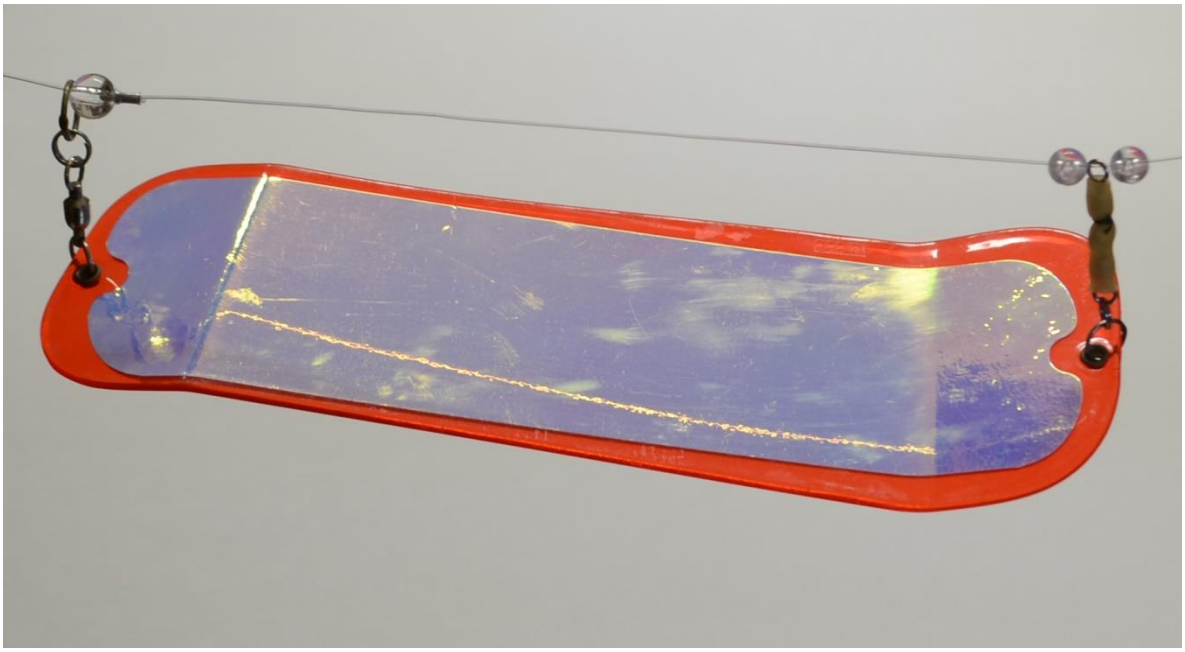
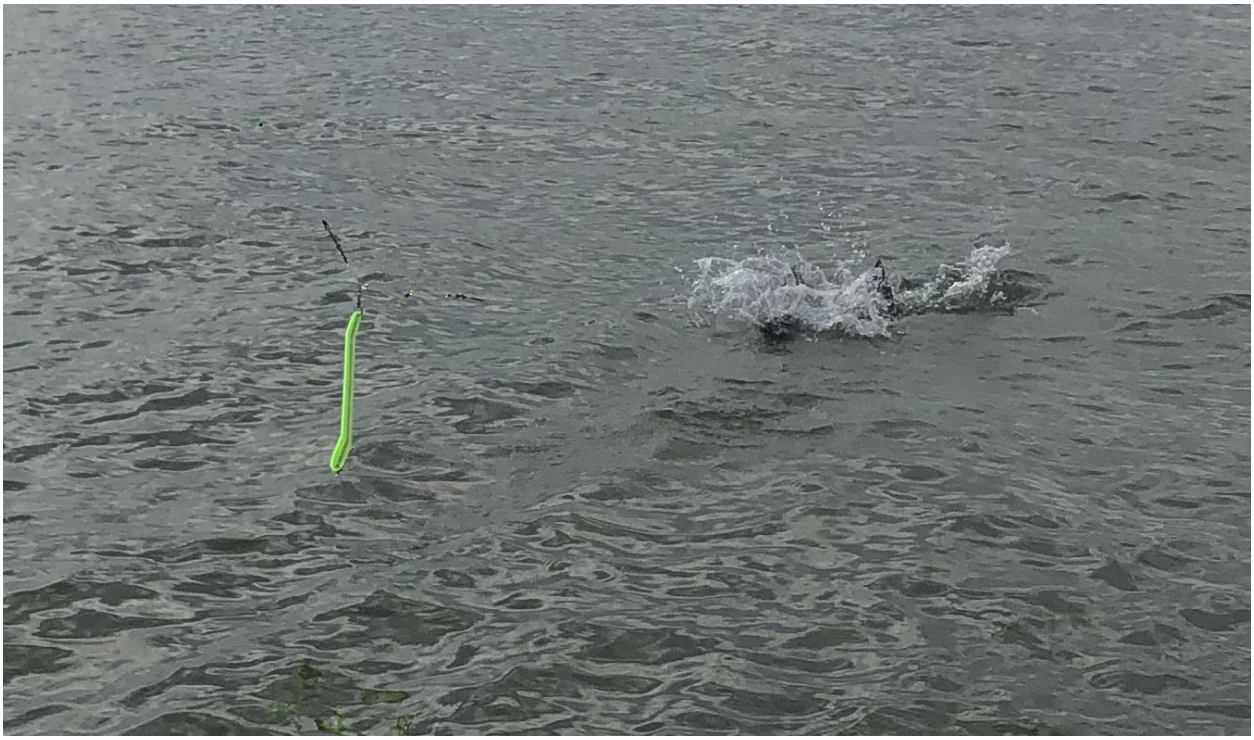
Breakaway Flashers

To be honest, I used to hate running flashers. However they are very effective and when the fishing is slow it's hard to avoid using them. Recently I've discovered breakaway flashers and I think they are terrific.



The photo above shows one of my favourite flashers modified for breakaway operation. The line from the rod passes through a #9 welded ring (shown on the upper left) and a 12 mm clear plastic bead. The bead is held in position by a crimped aluminum stopper. The flasher can slide as far up the line as the rod tip, but no further down than the 12 mm bead and stopper.
The bottom end of the flasher (shown on the right) is attached through a simple breakaway device to a 1/0 barrel swivel, which slides on the line. When a salmon strikes he pulls against the rod tip instead of the flasher -- strikes are very clear. Then when the salmon whips his body from side to side or begins his run he pulls against the breakaway device and it releases from the flasher, which then hangs from the #9 welded ring at the front. The flasher slides up the line, often to the surface. Essentially the fisherman plays the salmon as if the flasher is not there. Small salmon are a lot more fun and trophy salmon can be fought with confidence.

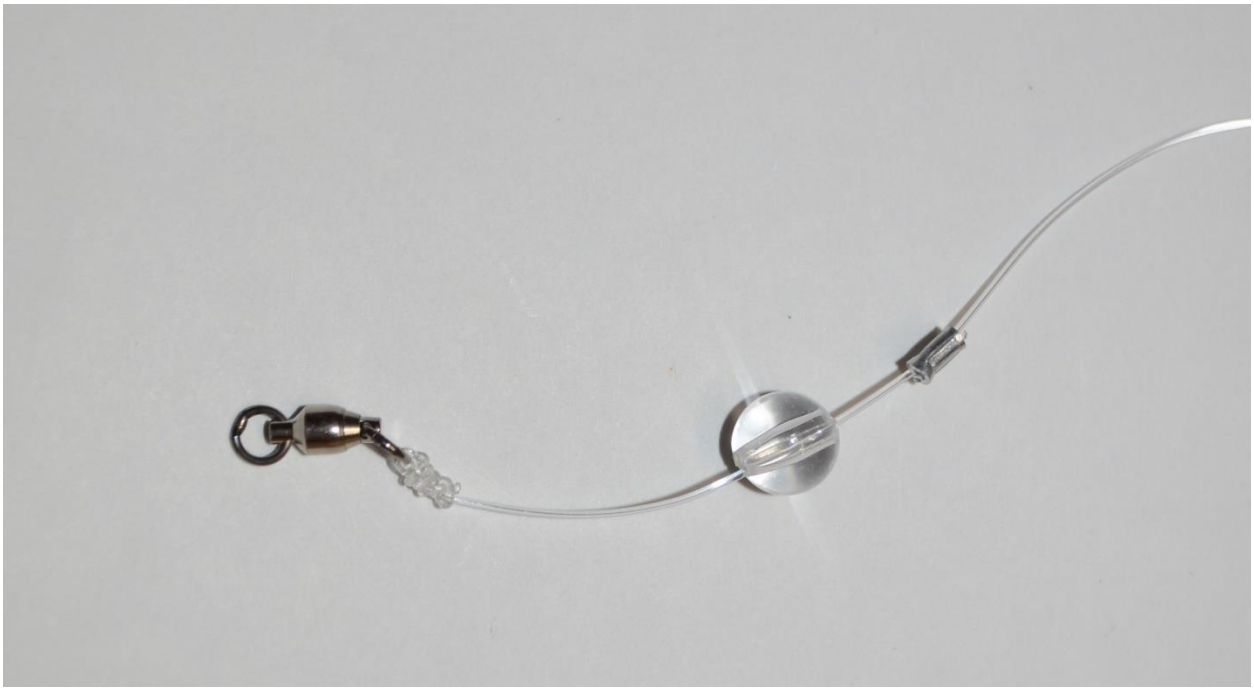


Breakaway Flasher in Action

I've tried several commercially available breakaway rigs (and the Gibbs Farr Better flashers work very well) but my preference is to modify existing flashers. This gives me more choice in flashers and also allows me to use my favourite flashers (i.e. the ones that catch fish).

The photo above shows the top end of the flasher, which faces the boat. Add a #6 split ring and a #9 welded ring, as shown. The #9 welded ring might be difficult to find, however one option is to cannibalize an old flasher.
A #9 split ring can be substituted, however there is always the possibility of the fishing line working its way through the split ring and losing the flasher (this is a particular problem when using small diameter braided line). Welded rings are more reliable.

This photo shows the bottom end of the flasher, which normally connects to the leader and terminal gear. Remove the ball bearing swivel and add a #5 split ring and a 1/0 barrel swivel.



The leading edge of the breakaway rig is shown above. Start with a 23 inch piece of 80 lb monofilament line and tie it to a #4 stainless steel ball bearing swivel. Make sure that the outer shell of the swivel is facing upstream as shown, so water, dirt and algae are not swept inside the swivel as it rotates. I use a knot instead of a crimped connection so the #9 welded ring on the flasher is less likely to catch as it slides up the line. The bead is 12 mm, which is larger than the inside diameter of the #9 welded ring, preventing the welded ring from sliding down past the bead. The bead is held in position with an aluminum crimp stopper.

The trailing edge of the breakaway rig is shown above. The breakaway device is a piece of 1/4 inch outside diameter (about 5/32 inch inside diameter) surgical rubber tubing. This is available at fishing supply stores and is commonly used by drift fishermen for securing pencil lead weights. Cut the tubing 1.25 inches long and slide it over a 1/0 barrel swivel, and tie to the barrel swivel as shown. The two clear plastic beads are 10 mm. I use a crimp connection to secure the 80 lb monofilament line to a #4 stainless steel ball bearing swivel, taking care again to ensure that the outer shell of the swivel is facing upstream. A #6 split ring is used to connect the swivel to a snap (recovered from the flasher).

Thread the leading edge of the breakaway rig through the #9 welded ring on the flasher and attach to the fishing line. Then insert the 1/0 barrel swivel at the bottom end of the flasher into the surgical rubber tubing of the breakaway device, attach the terminal gear (the leader to a hootchie, bait or spoon) to the snap and you're ready to go.

As it rotates the flasher will make approximately a five foot arc and the purpose of the breakaway device is to keep the top end of the leader within an inch or two of the flasher, so the flasher provides action to the terminal gear. Since the breakaway device slides on the line there is very little tension on the surgical rubber tubing – it can be set so that it holds the flasher very lightly, if desired. I usually slide the surgical rubber tubing over the entire barrel swivel when I'm fishing for springs or big coho, and just over the lower part of the barrel swivel when I'm fishing for smaller salmon so it releases easily.

Fishing with a breakaway flasher is amazing. A strong chinook will tear off on sizzling runs, leaving the flasher hanging from the line at the surface near the boat. Many times I've had twenty pound chinook jump five feet out of the water, which is rare when running normal flashers.

Over time (many successful days of fishing) the continual stretching will fatigue the surgical rubber tubing and it will tear into two pieces. I carry a couple of spare breakaway rigs in the boat so they can be exchanged quickly. I replace the torn piece of surgical rubber tubing later, at home.

Bill Haymond is author of "The Science of Salmon Fishing", which is available at www.thescienceofsalmonfishing.com.