

SAA LECTURE No L5

DIVE LEADERSHIP



Dive Leadership

The SAA employs, as do most training agencies, the buddy system of diving. At the very least each dive needs a Dive Leader. The Dive Leader is one who, albeit by agreement when equals are diving together, takes charge of the dive itself.

Qualified Dive Leaders

This is someone who takes charge of the dive and carries out all necessary safety and equipment checks and liaises with both the Dive Marshall and the buddy with reference to the proposed dive plan.

A Dive Leader is someone who has had additional experience, both practical and theoretical and has proven their ability to lead divers underwater. This must include practical and theoretical understanding of Rescue and First Aid.

A Dive Leader may dive with certified Open Water Divers and above, but not exceeding 20m depth with OWD's. A Dive Leader must have completed at least 15 additional dives in a variety of conditions.

The Duties of a Dive Leader

Dive Leaders provide the experience necessary to guide trainees through their open water training and are there to monitor these trainees, to give them advice and guidance.

- Dive Leaders take an active role in planning and co-ordinating dives
- Dive Leaders assist Dive Marshalls in their duties
- Dive Leaders act as mentors to trainee divers
- Dive Leaders DO NOT INSTRUCT their buddies
- Dive Leaders guide novices through their open water training by setting good examples both above and below the water
- Dive Leaders have a duty of care to their buddies in respect of decision making based on the safety of the dive
- Dive Leaders ensure that the dive is FUN!

Depth and Other Limits

Depth limitations are part of SAA progressive training and are reflected within the initial qualifications. Depth can only be increased as the individual's experience, knowledge, and confidence grows. There is no automatic movement from one grade to the next on the number of dives alone or the extent of their knowledge or confidence.

Age is also of concern. Young people must be properly cared for and not exposed to undue risk. For this reason the **SAA** has introduced a number of age brackets for young people (e.g. children's lungs do not develop sufficiently before 12 years old to allow safe diving).

At the other end of the age scale, it is the diver and his/her physician who will determine the limits.

Risk Assessment

Much of what you do when preparing your dive plans is "risk assessment".

Divers have responsibilities to:

- other divers
- trainee divers
- other water users
- rescue and other emergency services
- the general public
- their families
- themselves

You have a duty placed on you to act with reasonable care not just for your own safety, but for the safety of others. As a Diver Leader this duty is amplified, particularly when dealing with trainees and the inexperienced. They will be relying on your knowledge and practical experience to keep them safe.

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There are five basic steps to risk assessment:

- Look for hazards
- Determine those at risk
- Evaluate the risk and decide whether the current precautions are appropriate or need adjustment
- Record your findings
- Review your assessment and alter as necessary

A **hazard** is any thing that can cause harm - which includes non-diving factors (physical damage from falling over in a boat due a rough sea)

Risk is defined as the chance “High” or “Low” that someone will be harmed.

Current precautions

On a previous visit to the dive site you may have assessed the situation. You need to ask yourself ... has anything changed? Is the beach crowded? Will a stationary but unguarded prop on the RIB be a potential problem for a falling child etc?

Record your findings

In the event of an accident you may be called upon to show that you did take suitable and sufficient precautions. You may need to show that: (i) A proper check was made; (ii) You asked who might be affected; (iii) You dealt with all obvious factors and (iv) The precautions were reasonable and the risk was low.

Review your assessment

Life does not stand still, keep your eyes open and be prepared to alter your risk assessment as necessary.

Dive Plans

Generally Dive Leaders lead one dive team. However, that team may be part of a larger group, so the particular dive plan of each pair must fit within the overall plan determined by the Diving Officer or Dive Marshall

In particular the buddy's plan must include:

- Decompression - maximum depth and bottom time limits
- Gas requirements, including emergency gas supplies
- Underwater visibility, buddy-line etc
- Tides/current
- Weather conditions

Evaluation of dive plans

The very minimum that a Dive Leader should be looking for in a buddy's dive plan is:

- Maximum planned depth
- Bottom time
- Decompression stops
- Gas requirements and backup gas

Communication of Group Plan

Many dives are just for fun and have no overall specific plan. Training dives will have specific objectives and these will be spelled out by the Diving Officer or Dive Marshall. The Dive Leader must then relate this to the diver under instruction and confirm: (i) It is as expected and (ii) The trainee is still willing to participate.

On the other hand, if a special job needs to be done then the Diving Officer or Dive Marshal may prefer to give specific briefings to individual groups.

Dive and Safety Equipment

It is the job of the Dive Leader to check that the proposed equipment is suitable for the dive or the job at hand. In particular all divers are required to employ an octopus rig, and when looking after trainee divers an alternative air supply (a pony) is required. In any event there should be sufficient gas to extricate both trainee and Dive Leader from depth.

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What equipment will be needed for the dive?

- Personal diving equipment
- Watch, depth gauge, compass
- Extra equipment for Decompression stops
- SAA Buhlmann Tables
- Shot lines/Surface marker buoys (Delayed)
- Torch (batteries checked?)

Divers must also be responsible for providing their own personal protective equipment e.g.

- Hat, for protection from heat loss or sun burn
- Windproof clothing for between dives to make sure that they stay warm and comfortable.

Safety Support

Safety support is anything that supports the safety of the buddy pair. In the event of an emergency the Club Accident Management Plan should swing into action. All Dive Leaders should know what the plan is and where it is stored; where is the emergency equipment (e.g. radio, oxygen kit, first aid kit, fresh water etc.). Who else is available to assist in an accident management situation? It is important to know what qualifications and experience other divers hold. This may affect the choice of the proposed dive site and plan. Things to consider would be:

- Open Water Instructor
- Diver Rescue
- Diver First Aid
- Oxygen Administration

Safety support is always available from the Emergency Services: Marine VHF Radio Ch 16 when at Sea and telephone 999 for the Coastguard, and other emergency services on land.