

Diving Should Be As Safe as Cooking in Your Galley



BY
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for WorkSafeBC

2. Owners and masters must ensure that dive tenders and supervisors train and direct divers and other crew adequately and periodically conduct dive rescue drills.
3. During diving operations, know where every diver is at all times and have a qualified first-aid person on board.
4. Properly secure and position air compressors to prevent movement or air contamination. Drain moisture cocks regularly, visually inspect connections, and test the quality of the air from compressors at least annually.
5. Train divers in safe dive harvesting practices and make sure they follow them. Keep medical examinations up-to-date, log all dives including bottom times and surface intervals, have a lifeline or other way to communicate with the surface, always work with a standby diver, make sure all other divers leave the water when you do and never re-enter with a depleted air supply.
6. Dive tenders, supervisors and divers must know and control the factors contributing to decompression sickness, and keep the dive well within non-decompression limits.

When divers make mistakes, the result is often grieving families and crewmembers, and communities in shock. Consider these cases.

- Not wanting to take time to get a fresh tank, a diver working alone ran out of air in 35 feet of water after going down “just once more” to recover a bag of sea cucumbers.
- One young man lied about his diving experience. He was found floating face down, tethered by the dry suit inflator to his pack on the bottom. He had put on his gear incorrectly.

I remember a diving incident that could have turned ugly. On a halibut trip across the Gulf of Alaska, we felt a horrible vibration in the stern. Our engineer had scuba gear and when he dove under the boat he found a chunk of one propeller blade missing. None of us had even thought about how we might recover him if he ran into trouble!

Diver safety in BC has improved and we have a better record than in Alaska, but even so, three divers have died since 1998.

More than human error threatens divers who earn a living collecting geoducks, sea urchins and sea cucumbers and other commercial dive fishing work. It's also adverse weather conditions, murky water, shifting underwater currents, tangled air lines, equipment malfunctions and dangerous marine life.

It's hazardous work, yes, but diving should be as safe as cooking in your galley. Here's a quick, six-step recipe:

1. Make three divers your minimum crew size, as required by the Competency Code for Diving Operations. It's literally a code to live by, developed by the Canadian Standards Association with input from groups such as WorkSafeBC.



Of course, those are just the basics. For the full-meal deal on safe diving, go to www.worksafebc.com and click on “OHS Regulation” under “Quick Links” in the left-hand column. On the page that opens, enter “Dive Fishing” in the search engine. Next on your screen will be the essential ingredients for safe diving.

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