



Safe Operating Practice 11-10

Recreational Diving Safety Reminder

Approved January 2010

Issue. Each year there are a number of accidents and fatalities involving skin and scuba diving. Many of these accidents can be attributed to divers not practicing basic diving safety principles and not being familiar with Hawaii's unique diving locations.

Discussion. Recreational skin (snorkeling) and scuba diving in Hawaii are popular sports, enabling participants to perform various underwater activities in a rich and diverse, sensitive marine environment. Divers frequently fall into three categories; local recreational and commercial divers, visitors (tourists) and military personnel and families. Diving activities generally originate from the shore or from boats.

Since 1996, the local maritime community has carried out an ongoing effort to evaluate and improve the safety of commercial recreational diving operations from vessels in Hawaii. The result of this effort was the generation of H.O.S.T. Safe Operating Practice (SOP) 5-97 (revised in 2003) "Dive Operations from Vessels". Although the SOP has served Hawaii and its dive community well, periodic review is beneficial to ensure the best practices necessary to maintain the safety and vitality of the entire industry.

However, each year there are a number of diving accidents involving recreational divers that do not appear to be following basic diving safety principles. These incidents have been brought to the attention of HOST and discussions indicate that there is a need for a safety brochure to remind divers of some of the more important safety principles that will help them be safer on their dive. This reminder can be distributed at dive shops, dive clubs, equipment sales and rental operations, military bases and popular mass media outlets. It is believed that a safety reminder can help reduce and mitigate diving accidents in Hawaii.

Recommendations of H.O.S.T:

1. Create and distribute a Recreational Diving Safety Reminder brochure that can be used by recreational divers. Periodically review the safety reminder to ensure that it is up-to-date and meets the needs of recreational divers.
2. Develop and utilize all available outlets to distribute the reminders to divers. Ensure that there is an adequate supply of brochures to be distributed.

Resolution. Representatives from Hawaii dive and safety communities assisted in developing the recreational diving safety reminder. HOST will produce the reminder and ensure that it is distributed to necessary outlets and ensure that it is reviewed and updated on a timely basis.



RECREATIONAL DIVING SAFETY REMINDER

Many Skin and Scuba diving accidents can be attributed to not practicing basic diving safety principles. This guide is only a safety reminder and is not meant to take the place of or circumvent formal diving instruction or structured guided diving tours, or diving experience. This reminder has been broken down into three sections; BEFORE YOU GO, DURING THE DIVE AND END OF THE DIVE.

BEFORE YOU GO

Know your physical abilities and the requirements of the area and make sure you are physically capable of performing your dive activities. Make sure your dive training and experience is appropriate for your dive program.

Make sure you have all the necessary dive equipment and that it is in proper condition. Use a dive flag. It's the law (HAR § 13-245-9) and is required for both skin and scuba diving. A dive buoy and audible signaling device are recommended.

Dive with a buddy and maintain the "Buddy System" throughout the dive. *Never dive alone.*

Have a dive plan of your trip and make sure someone on shore is familiar with it. Have an alternate plan in case the situation changes before or during the dive. The best way to learn about a new dive site is to dive with someone who is familiar with the area, such as a professional dive guide or experienced diver. Another way is to get information from a dive shop, "Lifeguards", or someone with local knowledge.

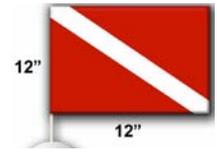
Spend time observing the dive area to ensure it is safe for your level of expertise. Assess the surf conditions, current direction and speed, visibility, distances, depths, shoreline hazards, and any other potential safety concerns. Especially look for safe entry and exit areas and an alternate area in case circumstances change. Practice the entry and exit before heading out.

Never dive in channels, shipping lanes and recreational areas where surfers, wind surfers, jet skis, boats and other non-dive related activities present a danger.

Know how to enter the dive areas safely and when in doubt, "Don't go out."



DURING THE DIVE



Use all equipment properly. Dive with a dive flag. It's the law. Maintain the "BUDDY SYSTEM". *Never dive alone*.

Observe your location during the dive to ensure you stay in your planned diving area and do not stray into a dangerous area. Remember, just because you are in a "diving" area, other ocean users might not be following proper boating rules and can become a potential problem for you. Be alert and watch out!

Study and follow all safe diving rules.

Be aware of and how to avoid dangerous sea life such as eels, man-o-war, box jellyfish, urchins, sharp coral, sharks, etc.

Be alert for changes in currents and waves. They are known to change without warning. Use your alternate plan if necessary. When diving from a boat, deploy a safety line and float off the stern of the boat to assist a diver that might get swept aft of the boat by a change in the current.

When scuba diving, delay surfacing if you hear a boat in the area. While surfacing, and when on the surface, look in all directions and listen for boats and other water craft that may be overhead or headed in your direction. Make yourself as visible as possible and try to make eye contact with the operator. Be prepared to quickly submerge (vest deflated, regulator ready) if necessary.

When skin diving, watch for boats and other water craft that may be overhead or nearby. Make yourself as visible as possible.

Give yourself time to complete your dive and exit properly. Do not push your limits.

END OF THE DIVE

Give yourself time to dive and exit properly. Use all equipment properly.

Study and know how to use the exit site before starting the dive. While attempting to get out is not the time to be learning about the exit site.

Have an alternate site in mind if necessary.

To preserve your strength, do not fight currents or waves.

Stay with your buddy and assist each other.

When in doubt, signal for help and stay in a safe area with safety equipment until help arrives.

Do not hesitate shedding your weights or tank if you get in trouble.

After a successful dive notify your family or friends on shore that all is OK.

Log any incidents or dangerous encounters that can be used as a reference in future dives or that can be shared with others considering diving in that same area.