

ARTICLES OF INTEREST REPRINTED FROM OTHER JOURNALS

ASSUME THE RISK AND TAKE THE BLAME

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Key Words

Environment, recreational diving, risk, safety.

I am not fond of flying. As I strap in, my usually serene mental state is disturbed by niggling doubts:- will the wings fall off? didn't the pilot look drunk? why are the ground crew kicking the tyres? Only by serious mental discipline can I overcome this paranoia, resign myself to my fate and get secured for the take-off.

When I strap on scuba and prepare to dive, a different set of thoughts are set in motion. Am I feeling OK?, do I have the skills, knowledge and equipment necessary to overcome the risk of this dive to make it safe for me? If I am diving with someone else, my buddy, will he or she decrease or increase the risk of the dive?

I am hoping the divemaster will provide some information that can help me determine the risk for this particular dive, such as a map of the site with depths indicated and possible currents and peculiar hazards described. Also useful would be popular dive plans, distinctive features for navigation and a description of interesting marine life. This will assist me in creating a dive plan that is safe **for me**, taking into account my particular experience and abilities. Only I can do that, not the divemaster nor anyone else.

But the divemaster has not provided me with any useful information about the dive site as he is too busy telling everyone "not" - not to leave their buddy, not to go deeper than 18 m, not to make a decompression dive, not to touch anything, not to surface without making a safety stop, not to get back on the boat with less than one quarter of a tank of air remaining and not to stay underwater for more than forty minutes. He is worried that he might be blamed if a problem occurs. Ironically he is actually making the dive less safe by spouting rules instead of giving local information.

A scuba dive involves **active** participation while an aircraft ride involves **passive** participation. For the aircraft ride if something goes wrong I feel I have a right to blame someone, but for the Scuba dive, if anything goes wrong it is **my** fault. I do not have "rights", I have "responsibilities". I like diving more than flying because I have control. I can even choose not to dive if I do not like the look of the dive site and if I do something wrong I blame **myself** and apologise to the divemaster.

The sport of diving has shown itself to be responsible in that, from its earliest days, certification courses were created so that budding divers could learn how to survive underwater. I have always been a great believer in NAUI's marvellous creed "Safety through Education", note this is Education not Regulation. Few, if any, other sports have anything like the complex system of certification courses that diving has nor require certification before participation. Anyone can choose to climb Mount Everest, or ski down it, but to go diving you need certification and, guess what, **we** did this, **not** any Government.

But what does this certification mean if divemasters ignore it and proceed to spout a litany of rules before every dive? Surely certification is meant to signify a level of competence and bestows responsibility on the diver. The dive master can offer reminders, particularly to the inexperienced, fair enough, but the divemaster's job is to provide local knowledge that will assist the diver to plan the dive, and organise for rescues in case the diver makes a mistake. They are not there to take responsibility for the mistake, **even** if the information they have given is inaccurate.

Our certification courses are appropriate for the activities they are intended for, but divers must recognise they are limited by their training and experience. Some recently certified Openwater divers immediately imagine they are qualified for Commercial diving. The one **big** difference they all ignore is that, for Construction (Commercial) diving, **the risk is determined by the job**.

Which is why I have the utmost respect for Construction divers who have to dive in the most appalling conditions, but, with Recreational diving, **the risk is chosen by the diver**. Divers can choose to dive deep or shallow, to stay near the boat or swim a distance away. They can even choose NOT to dive if the conditions are poor.

As a passive, paying passenger in an aircraft, if the airline screws up, and I get injured, then they have breached their duty of care and they should pay for it. Diving is fundamentally different. I might be prepared to demand compensation if the boat sank on the way to the dive site while I am still a passive passenger but, once I am diving, I am my own responsibility. It cannot be any other way since there is no practical way for the divemaster to control me when I am underwater and no practical way for the divemaster to know my real diving ability. All he can do is inspect my diving certification, which should be enough. It is up to **me** to know my ability and to apply it appropriately in planning the dive. I am a **responsible diver**.

Unfortunately some people cannot work this out. They look for someone else to blame. They think that if a diver gets bent it must be the fault of the divemaster or boat owner or perhaps the instructor or the instructor's training organisation or perhaps the equipment manufacturer or maybe stress from work or, and this is very sad, but do you realise the diver's parents never actually had sex together. That excuses everything.

Let me make this clear, if a diver gets bent **it is his or her fault!** Not only should they suffer the pain and inconvenience and cost of the injury, they should be **fined!** (well, not really, but you get the idea). The boat owner should be able to demand compensation! Do not think that this is so outrageous, dangerous drivers of cars are fined if they have an accident, why not dangerous divers? What is more, if a diver fails to report post-dive symptoms to the divemaster resulting in delayed treatment, then the diver has to take the blame for the more severe or permanent injury which could occur. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but (proclaimed) ignorance of the laws of diving apparently is. "The divemaster never told me I could get bent". Well I am telling everyone now, to be a safe diver you need **skills** (and good health), **knowledge**, the **right equipment** and **good luck**. If you do not have them and you get hurt then it is **your fault**.

Dangerous divers are those who attempt dives for which they do not have sufficient skills, knowledge nor the correct equipment. If they get away with it, well that is their good luck. If they do not, and get hurt, make them pay! A diving certification means **no excuses**. I am sure responsible (= **safe**) divers will cheer, and if a responsible diver gets hurt through some unpredictable event, or an admitted mistake, we can show the appropriate mercy. How many of you have had dives ruined by dangerous divers who dive beyond their ability or who make no effort to keep themselves in touch with responsible diving?

The very dangerous result of encouraging the transfer of blame from the diver to a third party (which is apparently the aim of Workplace diving legislation) is that it removes the incentive for people to become skilled at what they do. They unrealistically imagine that "the dive master will look after me." It also encourages legal action against the dive master or operator by lazy, stupid or corrupt divers after a bit of easy money. There is actual evidence of this is Queensland.

It has been said that amateurs practice until they get it right and professionals practice until they cannot get it wrong. To be a safe diver the professional approach is required and this takes time and effort. **Passive** participation in diving is just not possible. Unfortunately things **will** inevitably go wrong from time to time, even with the most experienced and well trained diver, and that is because:-

- 1 People make mistakes. Alas we are but human.
- 2 Unpredictable events occur.

Safe diving, from my personal experience, involves avoiding other divers underwater as much as possible so that I will not be troubled by their mistakes and being totally self-sufficient, with redundant systems, so that if even I make a mistake I can easily recover. I also like to know that there is someone competent looking out for me on the surface and able to rescue me if I end up away from the boat. To avoid unpredictable effects of a negative kind I worship Neptune, the occasional sacrifice of an old Nikonos camera seems to do the trick just fine!

Diving is Adventure and this implies exposure to increased risk. I wish you great adventures, just assume the risk and, if you stuff up, take the blame.

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IN-WATER RECOMPRESSION AS AN EMERGENCY FIELD TREATMENT OF DECOMPRESSION ILLNESS

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Abstract

In-water recompression (IWR) is defined as the practice of treating divers suffering from decompression illness (DCI) by recompression underwater after the onset of DCI symptoms. The practice of IWR has been strongly discouraged by many authors, recompression chamber operators and diving physicians. Much of the opposition to IWR is founded in the theoretical risks associated with placing a person suffering from DCI into the uncontrolled underwater environment. Evidence from available reports of attempted IWR indicates an overwhelming majority of cases in which the condition of DCI victims improved after attempted IWR. At least three formal methods of IWR have been published. All of them prescribe breathing 100% oxygen for prolonged periods of time at a depth of 9 m (30 ft), supplied using a full face mask. Many factors must be considered when determining whether IWR should be