



# Time To Be Refreshed

**Andy Clark continues his series on safer diving with an overview of what divers can do to improve their competence ...**

THERE'S A good deal to be said about being in a regulated diving team. Often, the significance of it may be paid little or no attention with true values frequently appearing insignificant. Much like anything, the advantages are only appreciated when the opportunity to sit and ponder one's good fortune allows.

It is with such realisation that the worth of mandatory refresher training is recognised. Generally, after every two or three years police divers are required to attend Basic Divers' refresher courses or as qualifications progress, refresher courses for Diving Supervisors.

The opportunity to recap diving theory and practise, instils competency and confidence in one's self and in other police team members. Remember that police divers, as with sport divers, may have to dive with or alongside relative strangers. Police divers dive with the confidence that their buddy or standby diver, are subject to regular mandatory diver training and as such should have a reasonable degree of competency in the water.

But how many sport divers I wonder, where such mandatory refresher training is absent, are happy to dive with a stranger? How do you gauge their experience? Asking for qualification records, dive logs and a valid medical, which incidentally you are perfectly entitled to do, can prove a little embarrassing. It is however the best way of affirmation and should of course all be agreed well before you are kitted up.

Without interrogating, questions to ascertain such particulars - how many dives have they done; when did they last dive; what conditions have they experience diving in; are they a suitable buddy for the planned dive? - are certain steps to deciding whether or not to carry out the dive. You may feel confident enough to assist your buddy should something go wrong, but can you guarantee the same should misfortune be reversed?

All such queries should be addressed satisfactorily, and as divers we should be accountable for our training and our experience as a matter of course. This should be realised from the very begin-

ning. Accountability is after all, on a par with responsibility. Once your fitness to dive is declared and your training begins that accountability and your personal responsibility is offered and accepted unconditionally.

Your tutor and the body with whom you are diving share the liability. They have a duty to offer and provide diving tuition according to their training regime that ensures your safety and seeks to develop you as a competent diver. This competency should be varied particularly when your diving qualification allows you to buddy another of equal (or lesser) experience. You can dive where and when you choose but your abilities should be reflected by your qualifications.

So do the training bodies offer instruction that will award the diver such (varied) experience? Generally, experienced divers and instructors will guide the novice through their qualifications ensuring that as many different diving conditions and scenarios as possible are made familiar. Indeed the diving bodies offer training packages and guidance that more or less ensure this. The HSE states: "The training programmes offered by all the major training agencies in the UK are very good if the relevant rules and procedures are followed."

That said, without strict guidance it is, in theory, possible to reach a qualification level that allows two equally qualified divers to enter a diving scenario that neither has experienced before! It is also theoretically possible for an 'experienced' diver to lead a less capable diver on a dive in unfamiliar conditions. It is not a common occurrence, but it does happen and diving incidents may follow.

So how can this be possible? One theory in support of PADI training is that American based agencies have to take account of diving in places without flowing water. Given the geography of the United States this goes some way to evidencing such training and acceptance.

But this is a concern for many UK divers. The HSE also share the concern and claim 'where incidents occur and medical fault is absent, quite often the cause is of a procedural error or lack of

experience. Maybe, on such realisation, training should be adapted to suit the region?

The UK, with little more than two or three hours drive to the nearest bit of ocean, obviously differs wildly from mid America where the nearest ocean may be days away! That said, diving bodies claim to understand related implications and as 'matter of course' direct inexperienced divers to seek additional guidance and often extra training.

Actual diving experience aside, the HSE are worried that 'many divers (including professional divers) have a poor appreciation of the physics and physiology of diving' and go on to say, 'these subjects are addressed on all training courses to a greater or lesser extent, but there will always be individuals who scrape through with the minimum of knowledge and forget most of it anyway'. More support for mandatory training perhaps? Poor knowledge in divers who dive beyond their capabilities is a hazardous combination! It's fact!

It all comes back to responsibility. Not just personal, but corporate too! You'll remember the agreement is two-way. The governing body provides the tuition and the guidance, and you as the diver provide the personal responsibility and the compliance.

The short falls (if that's what they are) maybe easier to detect by a diver 'at work' because they work within a regulated sector of the diving industry. Regulated operations and mandatory 'refresher' training combines to provide a diving fraternity that boasts a low incident rate.

So, does the recreational diving sector need regulating to address concerns over training (many regulations placed upon commercial diving may not be practicable i.e minimum manning in teams)? Is training within the commercial world any better? How could regulation be implemented and monitored if considered viable? How too would it affect sport divers and the general trade of sport diving if all were subject to mandatory refresher training?

I suspect a certain disgruntled sigh from many - extra tuition at extra cost,



mask clearing



out of air



assisted lift

and all eating into an already busy lifestyle while at the same time (arguably) stripping the leisure element from recreational diving! It wouldn't be a welcome introduction I feel sure. But what if there were guidelines and timetables that offered extra curricular courses to those interested in brushing up.

Perhaps the opportunity to spend a day revising diving illness or air requirements every other year or so, would be a welcome chance for many to hone and finely tune their existing knowledge.

To a degree, it could be monitored that way. Sign up, attend and receive

confirmation of your extra curricular attendance. Perhaps then a register of further training could be designed to record the qualifications and extra tuition that each diver has accomplished. Maybe a system could be introduced to contact all divers offering such tuition and advising those of the opportunity to further their knowledge by reminding them that it has been two years since they last attended an O2 Administration or Dive Planning / Air Requirements class?

Again, such ideals may be impractical as well as wholly unwelcome. But that doesn't stop the responsible diver

brushing up and including an element of self study. How else does one become proficient? How else can we measure our competency?

The HSE, all training bodies and the diving journals offer simple advice that is available to everyone without the need for regulation or mandatory training, and by simply adopting a fresh look at your diving you may see many ways to improve. They are after all, working to ensure sport diving is as safe as can be! It is you who can make the difference!

*Image overpage: self study - fundamental to diver training (courtesy Harry Clark)*

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