

25 Years

25 Diving Risk Management Tips -

Carol Christini



25 YEARS - CAROL CHRISTINI, M.A. SAFEGUARDING THE DIVE INDUSTRY

- 25.** “It can never happen to me, I am a skilled and seasoned scuba professional” is a foolish thought. Although a professional’s skills may be top notch certainly a diver’s training, skill, experience, and environment can make a tremendous difference. The longer a professional is in the industry the more likely there may be a dive event (statistics). Should you have a dive event report it as soon as possible.
- 24.** Appreciate that no matter how good a professional you are – you are not perfect. Set a good example and follow basic diving rules yourself. A dive professional can not control others. Divers choose to follow a leader, a direction, or advice given (“or not”) once they enter the water. Do the best you can, keep safety first, and **always err on the side of safety.**
- 23.** Good instructors and good dive business’ have bad events. What makes a good dive instructor or dive business is one that cares about reducing risk, and is open to continuing to learn and improve as new ideas are presented, and who chooses to expand risk management efforts as experiences and situations dictate.
- 22.** Create a Staff Procedures Manual. A manual can be your best ally in the establishment of rules, expectations, discipline, benefits, holiday, and vacation for your staff. A manual eliminates making decisions based upon circumstances (emotional) or a staff (relational). It allows you to think with a clear mind while establishing proper fairness and balance in the workplace.
- 21.** Conduct staff training meetings bi-annually or schedule more frequent staff meetings as needed. Review dive site maps and emergency procedures as mental preparation and rehearsal is paramount should a dive event occur.
Review other important company operating procedures as well.
- 20.** Provide staff evaluations annually or more frequently. Staff evaluations create a time to praise, discuss work expectations, set goals, and encourage professional growth. Evaluations will enhance employer and employee relationships.

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- 19.** Realize that “Liability follows the flow of money.” When you make money for a service you have exposure. How much exposure is to be determined. In addition, you can create an exposure by acting voluntarily in a professional capacity.
 - 18.** Read contracts and obtain advice “prior to signing.” When you sign a lease or contract without reading, a greater potential for non-compliance or default exists.
 - 17.** Sale scuba equipment to those who have completed training from a nationally recognized training agency that can be verified. Should a person want to purchase equipment while they are in training allow a significant down payment and can use the equipment during training. Once training is completed payment of the balance is made and possession of the equipment is transferred. If training is not completed refund the money, equipment is owned with only the proper skills.
 - 16.** Execute rental agreements. Repair or service diving equipment according to manufacturer’s guidelines using recommended parts. Retain good documentation.
 - 15.** Reinforce constantly that divers and dive leaders need to be mentally and physically ready for diving and that the equipment they use needs to be properly serviced. Not feeling well, not being mentally prepared for a dive, or having equipment issues underwater increases the risks of diving.
 - 14.** Encourage divers and dive leaders to dive within their training, experience, and skill level. When divers are outside their level of training and experience additional risks exist. Pushing the envelope underwater is a poor choice and not worth the risk. Divers should know their limitations, stay within their comfort level, and seek additional training for more diving experience. In addition, be aware of peer pressure that can place a diver in conditions beyond their training and experience level.
 - 13.** Establish a trip agreement which include pre-determined rules, guidelines, and waivers for your facility. Having a trip meeting will reinforce travelers and leaders are on the same page for: travel expectations, rules, guidelines, diving activities, land based activities, and emergency procedures.
 - 12.** Refrain from completely handing your traveling divers over to another dive leader(s) at a dive destination. You know your divers best, and should maintain some involvement in selection of diving location and type of diving that will best fit your diver’s skill, experience, and training.

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- 11.** Document, document, document! Be concerned with paperwork: executing the waiver and release at the proper time (early), obtaining medical history and proper physical releases (prior to training), and documenting training (at each step along the way – not at the end) is critical should you have a dive event. Poorly documented paperwork brings into question the capabilities of the dive professional and creates additional difficulties in providing a defense.
- 10.** Guard the training “system” for all levels of scuba instruction conducted. Use the recommended materials for each specific training agency, include: medicals, waivers, educational materials, and documentation. When a dive professional has experience with multiple training agencies, there may be a tendency to pick what is felt to be the best from each. Shield against creating your own system that may not be defensible. In addition, your training agency may not stand behind you when there is difficulty determining what training agency program is being taught.
- 9.** Properly address ADA civil rights issues, pay specific attention if you teach in a university or public school setting. Should a situation with an ADA person arise, state “I need to do some research so that I can properly accommodate your needs.” Then use all the resources available to you: training agency, DAN, insurance representatives, and legal advisors to determine how best to accommodate a person with the least amount of risk to the diver and others.
- 8.** Obtain waivers/releases for **“EVERY DIVER, EVERY TIME.”** Every time a diver is in the water, a waiver should be in place for the diving activity.
- 7.** Include in the waiver and release a “failure to rescue clause.” The three main duties of a dive professional are supervision, training, and rescue. You can not guarantee the safety of a diver because the diver has control over their own actions once they enter the water nor can you always rescue a diver should they have a problem. Leaving out failure to rescue in the waiver may create an opening for legal action because it is not addressed. The three main duties for a dive professional are supervision, training, and rescue. A good number of suits in the diving industry result from issues around rescue or failure to rescue.
- 6.** Avoid leaving a dive site without all divers. Take a role call and allow only the person whose name is called to respond.
- 5.** Demonstrate care and kindness. How a situation is managed after a dive event or a customer service concern at your dive business is simply good human relations – treating people as you would want to be treated. Think if you were in their situation what would you want. Without admitting any wrong doing, be sure to ask: “what can I do to help in this situation?” ***Listen!***

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4. Appreciate that any time the body is in motion, there are risks. The only way to eliminate risk is to do nothing at all -- but that does not sound like any fun. However, one would not dart across the street without looking both ways first. Why? Risk management -- taught by our parents when we were young. We enjoy life best when there is a good balance between risk and benefit.
 3. Be cognizant of diving risks in order to reduce, minimize or eliminate. Maintaining a heightened sense of awareness of the inherent risks of diving will offer an opportunity for response. Risk Management takes place long before claims management; **think prevention** -- *not reaction!*
 2. Comply with the highest standard: training agencies, RSTC, local law(s), or community standards. Professional duty will be measured by the highest of these standards. Seek to comprehend the intent of the standards in diving. Understanding the intent will create a deeper level of knowledge and will make compliance easier because you understand why the rule exists as well as the benefits.
 1. Understand levels of professional duty in order to meet those professional responsibilities properly. The professional duty varies based on the diving activity and the experience and skill level of the diver. Obviously there is a greater duty for a dive experience or entry level training. There is much less duty owed to an extremely experienced diver. Advanced training and other diving activities fall between these two spectrums. Appropriately acknowledge and embrace professional duty for specific activities and being aware of diver's skills, training, and experience levels will enhance a professional's capability in meeting responsibilities and exerting the proper amount of control for the situation.

**Thank You
For 25 Years !**

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