

Changes to Training and Diving Rules and Recommendations
June 2009



With immediate effect, the following ScotSAC requirements apply by way of mandatory amendments and additions to the existing Training and Diving Rules:

1. 'Try Dives' to be carried out within a swimming pool only;
2. A Dive Marshall/Safety Officer and First Aid Officer are appointed for all training dives;
3. All Instructors must demonstrate their competence in rescue techniques every three years to the satisfaction of their Branch Diving Officer or other instructor qualified to do so. Instructors who do not complete this requirement will be deemed inactive and unable to train or assess until such time as they do so;
4. Aqualung training be undertaken only by those who have met the membership requirements, including payment of membership fees, of both ScotSAC Ltd and a Branch;
5. All Instructors and trainees commence all training dives with at least 1500 litres of available air in the main cylinder, and that all divers ensure they commence any dive with sufficient air (or gas) available for the dive, with adequate reserves for safety.

In addition, ScotSAC Ltd recommends:

6. All trainees and "try dive" participants wear a quick release single buckle weight belt. In addition, buoyancy control, if required to be by weights at the commencement of a dive, should only be by standardised weights;
7. Alternate air sources (e.g. octopus regulators or pony cylinder regulators) are attached and readily accessible within a triangular area to the front of the diver's torso;
8. All divers are familiar with the manufacturer's recommendations concerning the operation of and warnings given by their dive computer;
9. Ankle weights should not be used by trainee divers and "try dive" participants as a means of achieving correct buoyancy;
10. A written risk assessment be completed prior to any training dive and "try dive";
11. A buddy check is carried out before every dive.

The changes are made in accordance with Byelaw 7.4.3 and Article 22 and will be subject to ratification at the next AGM of the Company by 31st October 2010.

Work is underway to develop additional resources including guidance for instructors and try dive participants and training record templates.

A risk assessment template and guidance are already available from www.scotsac.com

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the difference between Rules and Recommendations?

A: Rules are mandatory requirements; the 'must do' procedures that apply to all Members and Branches. The "recommendations" are strongly urged as "best practice" for the sake of all involved in dive training.

Q: Why are these changes and additions being made?

A: The changes are the result of a review of the recommendations made by Sheriff W Douglas Small following a Fatal Accident Inquiry. The recommendations have been carefully considered, at length, by a panel comprising experienced divers from NDC and Board (past and present); their deliberations were assessed by both Board and legal advisors before being adopted as our formal response to His Lordship.

Q: Do these changes mean our previous recommendations were deficient?

A: No, the changes are part of the process of continuous improvement, and it is in the interests of all Members, the Company and future participants to adopt the recommendations made in the FAI.

Q: What is the difference between a Trainee and a Try Dive Participant?

A: Trainees and Try Dive Participants are defined as follows:

- Trainee: An individual who has met the membership requirements of both ScotSAC Ltd and the Branch, and has not yet achieved the minimum diving qualification level.
- Try Dive Participant: An individual who is being introduced to the underwater environment for the first time (on a once-only basis).

Q: What is the triangular area to the front of the diver's torso?

A: The idea is that access to back-up air in an emergency should be as easy as possible – so, no more reaching behind tanks for octopus rigs. When facing each other, the "spare" source should be obvious, and easily accessible – by both parties.

Q: Why no ankle weights for trainees?

A: They shouldn't need them if their dry suit is a reasonable fit and they are properly trained in the pool before going into open water. There is no substitute for thorough training in buoyancy control; use of ankle weights can disguise underlying problems in this regard.

Q: What are standardised weights?

A: Simply put, blocks, or shot pouches, whose weight is known, and thus the weight of the whole belt can be calculated. Adjustments, for instance when using a different tank, can be made in a principled, precise fashion by removing or subtracting known quantity of lead.

Q: Why are "try dives" limited to a swimming pool and what if my club does not have regular access to a pool?

A: A swimming pool is usually a much safer, warmer and more predictable environment, rescue, should it be required is easier to manage, and first aid provision is usually superior to that available in the open water. Furthermore, the requirement for environmental protection such as exposure suits, dry suits etc is reduced, weight requirements are reduced and the "try diver" is far more likely to have an enjoyable experience. A few Branches do not have ready access to a swimming pool: it can only be that potential members must fulfil the membership requirements and commence training before they are allowed to put on an aqualung.

Q: Must the risk assessment be written?

A: A written risk assessment is the only means to formally identify the hazards which may cause harm or injury, and can help to anticipate individual problems in a training scenario, offering the possibility of putting into place the means of reducing the risk to tolerable levels. Risk assessments maybe very similar in some cases - in the case of a "Try Dive" in the Branch's

usual pool, for instance. This does not mean that a “generic” risk assessment can be assumed for each occasion, however, as different trainees, instructors, kit and so on may alter the risks involved. In Open Water training, use of the ScotSAC Dive Slate might be helpful in this regard.

Q: What can candidates do before joining?

A: Candidates must on no account be introduced to aqualung training before they have met the membership requirements mentioned elsewhere. Assessment of swimming ability, and introduction to basic snorkelling equipment are acceptable – but conducting aqualung training prior to membership being in place may result in a lack of liability insurance for both candidate and Instructor.

Q: Why has the requirement to introduce a “rescue refresher” been introduced? How will it work?

A: It is felt that having “passed” an assessment of rescue ability does not guarantee that a diver will be able to repeat those skills “for real” some ten years on, for instance. They may, or may not, have honed such skills by regular teaching. It is ScotSAC’s view that demonstrating such skill every three years is a reasonable “refresher” of the skill: the majority of other sports, after all, do not allow their instructors to “sit on” their awards without regularly having to prove competence. Instructors should demonstrate the skill at the level they hold, up to and including Master Diver. Further guidance on the conduct and recording of rescue refreshers will be issued to Branches in Summer 2009.

Q: Can the Dive Marshall / Safety Officer and First Aid Officer all be the same person? What do they do?

A: Yes, they can. For details of what tasks these officers undertake, see the front of the ScotSAC Log Book. It should be borne in mind, however, that the first indication that something has gone wrong with a dive is when a lone diver surfaces. It may, typically, be a case of separation of the pair. What is needed is for someone to spot the problem in the first place and, if required, be in a position to do something about it. In the scenario above, for example, giving the surfaced diver some indication (from the bubbles) of where the buddy is might be all that is required; alternatively, they may be in distress and need someone to swim out to them to give them a tow back in. The various tasks could well be undertaken by one person – if suitably experienced - for one pair of divers underwater; obviously, splitting the tasks if more divers are available makes life easier. A comprehensive risk assessment will determine the number of shore personnel required.

Q: What is a training dive?

A: We have to bear in mind the essential difference between a dive that is purely for pleasure by those qualified to do so, or one which builds up experience in terms of time spent underwater, and one where instruction is being given, and received. In the case of training, the “self-contained” nature of the diver’s equipment is often altered, deliberately, under controlled conditions. For instance, the trainee might flood the mask, or remove the demand valve. The level of training involved is immaterial: the same onus to provide cover applies to parties involving those working towards Sport Diver and Master Diver. In summary, any dive until a diver reaches Sport Diver level, or a dive where a diver is undertaking Master Diver training are considered training dives.