

# Safety Talks!

## Dangers for Occupational Divers

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Occupational divers put themselves at risk every time they brave the depths, whether harvesting seafood, repairing ships or retrieving golf balls from ponds. Each year hundreds of workers become entangled in vegetation, run out of air, get caught in small spaces or get the bends. Many die trying to rescue others or because no one is there to rescue them.

### WHAT'S THE DANGER

Human error is to blame for virtually every dive emergency, and what this underscores is the undeniable importance of careful planning, preparation and strict adherence to safety procedures. A diver must never underestimate the dangers associated with commercial diving and the importance of diving only if qualified.

### EXAMPLE

A worker drowned while completing routine underwater maintenance on a small boat. The man had been working below the surface for more than an hour when his co-workers became concerned and pulled his rescue line. The diver failed to surface, and by the time a second diver arrived the worker had died; his rescue line caught on a propeller he was unable to see in the murky water.

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Dive only if a supervisor and standby diver (ready to enter the water within one minute) are present. One of these people must know CPR.
- Dive only if properly trained to do so. A recreational scuba certificate is not adequate for occupational diving.

- Evaluate potential hazards before each dive, including weather conditions, water conditions and entanglement hazards such as weeds, netting and fishing lines.
- Maintain continuous contact with someone on the surface and with your diving partner (if applicable).
- Leave the water when other divers do and never re-enter with a depleted air supply.
- Watch for signs of decompression sickness (the bends) including skin rash, extreme fatigue, painful joints and paralysis. Decompress under a supervisor's guidance.
- Check your equipment carefully before each dive and have it verified by the dive coordinator.
- Carry a knife and alternate air source such as a pony bottle; a small cylinder strapped to a diver's main tank for emergency use.
- Wear a rescue line connecting you to the surface. Use a buoy to mark your location while in open water.
- Ensure all machines you are diving near are locked out and secure, including intakes, pipes and tunnels. Have additional rescue divers available if the risk of entrapment is high.

### FINAL WORD

*Occupational diving is exacting work with absolutely no room for error. Careful planning and strict adherence to safety guidelines are essential for keeping dives from turning disastrous.* ■

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. An occupational diver can enter the water when:
  - a. A second diver and supervisor are on site
  - b. A supervisor who has CPR training and can enter the water quickly is on site
  - c. When he has completed an equipment check
2. A diver must maintain contact with someone on the surface.  
☐ True ☐ False
3. A skin rash that develops after a dive may be a sign of decompression sickness.  
☐ True ☐ False
4. What is a pony bottle?
  - a. A cylinder of air that can be thrown to a worker in distress.
  - b. Water used to relieve the bends.
  - c. A small cylinder of air strapped to a diver's main tank.
5. A recreational diving certificate qualifies a person for occupational diving.  
☐ True ☐ False

### What Would You Do?

You are one of five divers harvesting sea urchins under the guidance of a supervisor and a back-up diver. The day has gone reasonably well but the crew has not met its quota and the supervisor asks the back-up diver to jump in and help. What do you do when you see him working alongside you and the other divers?

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T1807-03

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FOR THE LEADER

Workplace Safety ■ T1807-03

## BEFORE THE TALK

## 7 PREPARATION TIPS

- 1** Bring two dive plans to the meeting; one thorough and the other not. Ask workers to review both plans and comment on what is missing.
- 2** Ask workers to independently brainstorm the various things that can go wrong during a dive. Have each worker share his list and any relevant dive experience.
- 3** Review Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements and any local diving regulations as they pertain to occupational diving and your industry in particular.
- 4** Review your company's incident reports and how they compare to the industry average. What has the company done right? What could it do better?
- 5** The importance of checklists is discussed in this safety talk. Bring an example of a checklist used by divers.
- 6** Be prepared to answer questions about decompression sickness. A poster illustrating how the bends affects divers may be helpful.
- 7** Bring diving equipment to the meeting and ask workers to perform an equipment check. Point out anything they miss or could do better.

■ For information on a variety of safety topics, check out Bongarde's online network for safety professionals at <http://www.SafetyXChange.org>

■ If you want the latest in job safety news, tips, photos, health-related articles, fatality reports and audio talks, sign up for Safety Smart! Weekly Briefing at <http://www.SafetySmart.com>

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting conducted by: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY:** Each participant is to sign below, for record kept on file.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Answers to T1807-03 Quiz:

1. a 2. True 3. True 4. c 5. False

## AFTER THE TALK

## CHECKLIST

- Provided extra training to workers who did poorly on quiz  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Observed workers  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Refresher training  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

■ Other (describe)

\_\_\_\_\_

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_