

DIVER SAFETY MEANS "DIVE TENDER" SKILLS

It's autumn in Southeast Alaska. Actually we should call it "blow". You go to bed and the leaves are on the trees. When you wake up the leaves have been blown off. Autumn is also the beginning of dive harvest season. This is the time of year that Divers jump out of perfectly fine vessels to pick up sea cucumbers off the bottom of the ocean, or blast Geoduck clams out of the sand 30 feet underwater. By no means is this a job for the weak! Diving two and a half days a week takes a toll on the body and sometimes irreversible damage can occur. We all know divers who have pushed the safe dive "envelope" to the point that even they don't know how he dodged the "bubble". Those guys have been throwing the "dice" the day they got into the fishery, and we all know about playing the odds, the odds will usually win. Dead fishermen don't get paid. Only safe divers live to fish another day.

Safe Divers know that when it comes down to it, the "Dive Tender" can make or break the operation. Divers also know that his or her life depends on the skills the "Dive Tender" brings to the operation. Such as:

- First Aid/CPR
- Dive Rescue Techniques
- Recognizes decompression sickness
- Recognizes when a dive emergency exist
- Basic Seamanship and boat handling
- Nautical weather, or at least how to read the weather
- How to make a distress call on a VHF radio
- Knows small engine maintenance
- Can recognize the signs of hypothermia
- Is reliable
- Is sober

Each one of these items could fill several pages of instruction. A couple of publications that come to mind are; "*Essentials of Diving Safety*" and "*On-Site Management of Scuba Diving and Boating Emergencies*". Both of these excellent publications were written by Dr. Wesley Y. Yapor. Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) has produced a fine training film that focuses on what a Dive Tender should know. Also, DAN has several publications and brochures available to aid a Diver in developing a safe diving program. In my area, the Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fishermen's Association (SARDFA) has a standing safety committee. The committee was established to assist Divers develop safe diving practices and overall vessel safety.

If you are a member of SARDFA or any other dive Harvester association, I'm urging you to contact your safety committee to see what type of training is available in your area. Or, if you have ideas on how to make your industry safer, share them with you fellow Divers.

When I'm invited to conduct a safety exam on dive vessels, one of the first questions I ask the diver is, "Does your Dive Tender have first aid and CPR training?" Almost to a person, the reply is "No. He doesn't, but I do." I then I say "Give the tender the dive gear, throw him in the bay and you stay on the boat" Dive safety starts with the Diver. It's the Divers responsibility to insure that his "Dive Tender" is trained and is willing to except responsibility for the Divers life, your life!

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