

Standard operating procedures play a key role in ensuring a safe dive operation. Consistent use of documented procedures will assist in preventing incidents and accidents, provide early warnings of unsafe conditions, and, amongst other things, reduce exposure to liability.

A dive operator at minimum must have the following client-specific standard operating procedures in place:

1. Boat safety briefing

Education on boating procedures is vital to ensure an incident-free dive outing. Thorough boat or shore briefings should be conducted.

At minimum, the following topics should be covered on the dive boat:

- Location of emergency equipment
- Positions on the boat
- Proper use of the head
- Boarding and disembarking equipment
- Stowage and use of life jackets
- Importance of securing all divers
- Preparation of divers for any risks of physical injury when they navigate surf, rough waters, or areas with restricted access
- Importance of securing all personal gear, including diving gear, dive bags, and other personal items, to prevent items from moving during transit and to minimize the risk of tripping
- Prohibition against non-staff standing during launching

2. Pre-dive safety briefing

A pre-dive safety briefing is the final opportunity to convey important information about the dive to customers. The risk of an accident occurring increases when divers are not properly briefed on safety protocols and proper diving procedures.

At minimum, the following topics should be covered on the dive boat/shore:

- Identification and roles of the dive staff and crew
- Hand signals that will be used to communicate with the boat or shore crew
- Emergency procedures for lost diver, buddy separation, and out-of-air situations
- Location of emergency equipment and procedures for its use
- Information about the dive site (description, name, specific risks, etc.)
- Water conditions (visibility, current, surge, etc.)
- Local hazardous marine life
- Specific access, entry, and exit procedures

- Propeller safety procedures, where applicable
- Dive leader roles
- Buddy pairs
- Diver-recall system
- Features of the dive (depth, time, safety stop, suggested air reserves, descent/ascent procedures, etc.)
- Hand signals that will be used between divers, the divemaster, and/or the instructor
- Expectations regarding customer conduct
- How to get safely back onto the boat, where applicable

3. Head count using standardized system

The risk of failing to retrieve all divers who enter the water is constantly present, but it is elevated when operations take place in busy areas, in rough waters, and/or during inclement weather. Regardless of the conditions, a reliable system should be used to ensure that all divers are accounted for at the conclusion of every dive, such as a diver ID system.

4. Post-dive debriefing

Post-dive debriefings should be completed to ensure that customers are thoroughly informed of potential health issues that could present themselves after the dive. Denial or dismissal of symptoms could result in delayed treatment, so it is important to educate customers on the signs and symptoms of DCI, barotrauma, etc. Post-dive debriefings should also include a discussion on activities that must be avoided after diving, including flying, hot showers, driving over altitude, or excessive exercise. Failure to conduct a thorough post-dive debriefing may result in expose to legal liability.

