

Deep River Underwater Club

Scuba Diving Risks

21 April Draft – Final Draft

The dive community was shocked to learn of the fatal dive accident earlier this month in the Petawawa River. The DRUC wishes to express its great sympathy to the family and friends of the deceased, and to the Barracuda Scuba Club.

With the accident undergoing investigation, little information has been released concerning the fatality beyond the media reports. In light of this tragedy, and in response to many questions from the public, we wish to comment on the issue of scuba diving risks and the methods of managing those risks. DRUC does not know the details of the recent incident and the following comments are not associated with that sad event.

Risks are inherent in all sports, whether hockey, horseback riding, downhill skiing or even bicycling. The dive community recognizes the inherent risks associated with scuba diving, and it is because of the lengths taken to manage risks that scuba diving accidents are rare. A local incident serves as a strong reminder that accidents can still happen; we will apply what we can learn from this event to keep ourselves safe.

Risks in recreational scuba diving are managed by a combination of different means, including training and education, diving within your level of training and range of experience, maintaining good fitness and health, maintaining equipment in good condition, implementing safe diving practices, and planning to respond to emergencies. Safety and risk management are common threads through all aspects of diving, and the regulation of the sport through National and International certification programs provides continuity of practices and standards among different dive clubs, charter operations, and instruction programs. Training and education are aimed at risk awareness, risk control, and the appropriate responses to stressful situations that can occur during dives.

Safe diving practices and emergency response procedures are key components to dive training, and specialty training courses such as Rescue Diver are offered to enhance this important capability. Similarly, diving within your level of training and your range of experience is another cornerstone of safe diving, and specialty training courses such as Advanced Diver are provided in order to broaden this experience base in a controlled manner. Emergency response planning is a common component of all diving courses, with the essentials being dive planning (“plan your dive, then dive your plan”), keeping equipment in good condition, diving in buddy-pairs, emergency response procedures and planning, and first aid equipment and training. As with most other sporting events, dive events normally occur without incident, and afterwards the divers share their experiences with enthusiasm, then start to think about their next underwater adventure.

As with all recreational scuba diving clubs, there is a strong safety focus in all DRUC activities, whether in relation to training, equipment maintenance, or planning and conducting dive events. The club strongly promotes continuing education and training

through the courses delivered by its certified instructor, such as Rescue Diver, Advanced Diver, and Master Diver.

Within the DRUC training program, we actively seek to minimize the risk of dive accidents by providing a focus on the three leading causes of fatalities while diving, which are: natural causes (often heart attacks), rupturing of the lungs, and drowning. Before any training is undertaken, a thorough medical evaluation is undertaken and students who cannot satisfy the medical requirements will not be trained by DRUC. In this way, we minimize the risk of death by natural causes. To minimize the risk of lung injuries, we train and drill all divers on proper underwater breathing technique. Unfortunately, and perhaps surprisingly, drowning is the leading cause of death among scuba divers. As drowning often follows panic, we place an emphasis on problem recognition and response during swimming pool sessions in order to develop the recognition-response skill, and thereby lessen the chance of panic when a problem develops.

A recent report from the National Association of Underwater Instructors shows that too many drowned divers are found still wearing their weight belt. Because removal of their weight belt could have prevented many of these deaths, we will be modifying our training to further drill divers on removing their weight belts when in difficulty. Further, we will continue to update our training and dive event programs with the latest safety information.

In DRUC's roughly 50 years of existence, not one dive injury has resulted from DRUC dive activities. In the wake of the tragedy in Petawawa we will seek to learn from the event and apply this knowledge. We hope that because of the thorough precautionary measures we take, DRUC will continue to keep its zero-incident status.

For more information on the Deep River Underwater Club, please visit the club's website at www.druc.ca.