

CONDITIONAL RETURN TO ESSENTIAL RESEARCH DIVING ACTIVITY UNDER UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA AUSPICES

As of 6/1/2020, the UA Diving Control Board has determined that essential research diving activity under University auspices may be allowed under specific conditions as outlined below, which are designed to reduce the risk of COVID infection.

- New dive plan approval applications will be accepted as of today's date for current and ongoing UA research projects, for which Principal Investigators (PI), with the approval of the respective Dean, deem that diving is immediately necessary to the continuance of its research effort. College or Departmental concurrence should be indicated by a dean or department head signature on a field safety research plan, which is to be submitted with the dive plan.
- All divers listed on plans must be current in CPR, First Aid, O2, dive medical physical, and have a COVID Risk Acceptance form on file (see template).
- All dive plans must be accompanied by a COVID Dive Plan Amendment (see template).
 - COVID Dive Plan Amendments must include detailed descriptions of how dive operations will be designed to comply with the MINIMUM COVID19 EXPOSURE CONTROL GUIDELINES TO BE EMPLOYED FOR ESSENTIAL UA RESEARCH DIVING ACTIVITY, as outlined below.
- All PI's and divers must recognize that the current window of diving opportunity may be fleeting based on future public health trends. Pandemic stand-downs may be deemed necessary by the DCB with little forewarning. As such, project leaders should remain vigilant and prepared for periodic stand-downs dictated by increases in local SARS-CoV-2 infection rates.
- The following pertains to essential research diving operations only. Procedures for training dives are currently still on stand-down, with future opening to these activities to be determined.

MINIMUM COVID19 EXPOSURE CONTROL GUIDELINES TO BE EMPLOYED FOR ESSENTIAL UA RESEARCH DIVING ACTIVITY

The following are considered minimum requirements as of the date of this document. Additional measures may be required by the DCB based upon specific characteristics of the planned operations, environmental conditions, current community public health situation, or further guidance from UA.

- No diver will participate in the planned diving activities who feels ill or has reasonable cause to believe they have been exposed to COVID-19 (see COVID Risk Acceptance form)
- All diving is voluntary. Each diver is free to decline to dive.
- All diving operations must be conducted under the assumption that divers are currently infected, asymptomatic, and contagious.
- Dive teams and auxiliary personnel must be kept to a minimum, to reduce cross-infection and enhance infection tracing capability, if needed. Small, discrete teams of 3 or fewer total personnel (including support roles such as vessel operators and stand by divers) should be the objective.
 - If larger numbers of divers are required, the assigning of divers to specific, alternating or separate teams operating at different times or in different locations should be developed.

- o Shore-based dive operations should consist of no more than two independently operating and segregating buddy pairs, with the option for a shore-based safety diver if needed for the location, conditions or planned operations;
- o Dive teams deploying from small craft of 17 feet LOA or less without a separate operator/topside watch should be conducted with no more than two persons per vessel (an additional boat driver may be used if required). If more divers are needed for the planned operation, multiple vessels should be employed.
- o Diving from larger vessels that requires a dedicated captain/topside watch must be counted as part of the total personnel aboard. The total personnel in most cases should be limited to three (possibly more), depending on the vessel size, deck layout, and other characteristics that affect the ability of the team to maintain adequate interpersonal distancing. These considerations must be elucidated in the COVID Dive Plan Amendment.
- During all aspects of the operation, adequate interpersonal distancing must be maintained unless appropriate PPE (e.g., face masks) are employed. Minimum surface interpersonal distances must not be less than 6 feet. It must be recognized that the 6-foot distance is generally specified for indoor, land-based conditions. In a windy and moisture-laden environment such as a dive operation, downwind positions require greater distancing. Interpersonal distancing procedures apply to all surface activities associated with the dive including
 - o Vehicular and vessel transit to dive sites
 - o Vessel and vehicle sizing must be planned to allow adequate interpersonal distancing, and will be reviewed by the DCB as part of dive plan evaluation.
 - o At a minimum, all personnel while on the surface must wear a covering over their mouth and nose in order to reduce respiratory droplet dispersal from speech, coughs and sneezes into the air and onto vehicle and vessel surfaces, and discourage inadvertent face touching.
 - o Primary dive team operational planning and briefing should be conducted prior to departing for the dive site so that onsite discussions and prep are minimized.

DETAILED COVID GUIDELINES

- Each diver must only handle and test their own equipment.
- Each diver will perform functional testing and demonstrate operation of his/her equipment while observed by the buddy.
- During pre-dive checks, divers must not breathe from their own secondary second stage. Pre-dive functional testing must be accomplished via depressing the purge and listening for free flows.
- Diving must only be conducted under conditions in which normal (non-emergency) entries and exits can be made unassisted and in full gear.
 - This must be accomplished with each diver's mask in place and the divers breathing from their regulators.

- If air sharing is required, refrain from sharing a single second stage unless to refrain would result in injury or loss of life. Responding divers will establish contact and control, and then donate the secondary second stage.

- Equipment configurations with auxiliary second stages integrated into a BC inflator are not compatible with this requirement and cannot be used until further notice.

- Diver assist, rescues, and first aid must be approached with extra safety precautions in mind.

- Reinforce with all participants the need for standard use of PPE whenever available. This includes face masks and eye shields in all first aid situations, when available.

- In surface rescue and assist scenarios, unless an immediate assist is necessary to prevent loss of life, responding divers must stop a safe distance (at least two full body lengths, approximately 12 feet) from the distressed diver to perform initial assessment ("Are you OK? Inflate your BC! Drop your weights!").

- Where possible, divers should remain on their scuba regulators with their dive masks in place during surface activity.

- Surface tows should be performed with the primary objective of expediting extraction without attempting rescue breathing during transport.

- Dive equipment and any personal auxiliary equipment used must be dedicated to an individual diver for the duration of the diving operation.

- Each diver will only prepare, maintain, and handle their own diving equipment including during transportation and exit and entry from the water.

- All dive equipment and vehicles and vessels used must be properly disinfected according to CDC procedures before and after use, by the diver using it.

- Each diver must be responsible for disinfecting his/her own equipment. All regulator second stages and BC oral inflators must receive an initial freshwater rinse, then be immersed in a 10% bleach solution or other EPA-approved disinfectant, remaining wetted for at least 4 minutes, and then receive a final freshwater rinse before drying. It is recommended that all divers watch/read:

- o Divers Alert Network on-line presentation "Disinfecting Scuba Equipment" (<https://www.facebook.com/DiversAlertNetwork/videos/2870342669749405/>) or read DAN Article "Disinfection of Scuba Equipment and COVID-19" DAN Website (<https://www.diversalertnetwork.org/emailview/landing/coronavirus/gearDisinfection/index.html>)

- o Dr. Ebersole Article Diving in the era of COVID-19 (<https://www.divetech.com/post/diving-in-the-era-of-covid-19>)

- o For approved list of cleansers, see <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

- Equipment used by one diver will not be used by a different diver without an intervening period of at least 5 days and a re-disinfection prior to use.

- O2 kits, first aid supplies, etc... must be disinfected and disposed after use, using best practices.

WHILE THE UA DCB SETS THESE GUIDELINES AS A MINIMUM FOR RESEARCH DIVING OPERATIONS DEEMED ESSENTIAL TO THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH MISSION, RESEARCHERS, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS, AND ADMINISTRATORS SHOULD REMAIN MINDFUL THAT SIMILAR CONDITIONS AND CONCERNS EXIST IN ALL MARINE FIELD OPERATIONS, INCLUDING BOATING. ALL PARTIES ARE ADVISED TO CONSIDER WHETHER A PARTICULAR ACTIVITY IS TRULY ESSENTIAL, AND ENSURE SIMILAR PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED IN OTHER ACTIVITIES.

APPROVED BY UA DCB