

tion benefits and all the customary support services, which are handled by WorldNet Services. DiveSafe will work with the diver or his or her representative to arrange for hospital admittance/discharge deposits or other necessary advances for medical services. DiveSafe hopes to offer pre-authorize/guaranty payments for services by summer.

So, Which Plan is Best?

As with most insurance, there is no "one-size-fits-all." An individual living in a rural area who only dives a nearby quarry will not be heavily influenced by the \$10,000 dive trip

cancellation coverage offered by DAN's Preferred Plan. However, he will be interested in the requirement that the diver must be at least 50 miles from home before DAN TravelAssist benefits become effective. On the other hand, for the individual who primarily dives exotic and far-flung venues, this situation will be reversed.

When comparison shopping, consider such important features as lifetime maximum vs. per-occurrence benefits, depth limitations, coverage for non-diving related injuries, coverage for significant oth-

ers, and availability of both emergency and non-emergency expert medical assistance. By all means, don't pick a policy just because you want to support the organization that offers it. Pick a policy that meets your needs.

Don't get caught diving naked.

- Doc Vikingo

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Divers' 25-Hour Left at Sea Case Resolved

How to ensure you're not the next victim

Three years ago, an Australian dive boat left two American divers at sea. It took two days before anyone missed them. They were never seen again.

It almost happened again last year, this time in Florida, in an incident eerily reminiscent of the Great Barrier Reef tragedy. Last February, the Aqua-Nuts boat left a California couple at sea six miles off the Florida Keys. It took 25 hours before they were rescued. In March, a U.S. federal court fined the owner of the operation, Ricardo Investments, \$1,000 and put them on probation for two years, under Coast Guard supervision.

The firm's owners pleaded guilty to endangering human life by the grossly negligent operation of a dive boat. In a plea deal, the court also ordered Ricardo Investments to set up and operate "an effective safe diving program," with help from recognized industry experts. Subject to approval by the Coast Guard, the program is to be made available in the Keys to other diving companies, to area dive shops and to "interested persons," according to U.S. Attorney Guy A. Lewis. In a separate Coast

Guard administrative proceeding, the captain of the Aqua Nuts Divers II, James Evans, agreed to a one-year suspension of his Coast Guard License, with two years probations for negligence in this case.

The couple, Michael and Lynda Evans, *Undercurrent* subscribers, provided us with these details of the ordeal:

Last February we set off on what was to be a two-tank dive with Aqua-Nuts of Key Largo. Within two hours, we had been abandoned at sea and had embarked on a 26-hour ordeal that would change our lives.

After a safety briefing, the boat departed the dock about 1:00 p.m, with 25 passengers, the captain and a divemaster onboard. At the Elbow, the captain requested that we return to the boat with 500 psi and suggested that once we had consumed half of our air and if we had any doubt where the boat was, we should surface to get a bearing on the boat and begin our return trip. Once we were in the water, we followed the reef structure and had a pleasant dive. When I got down to 1,500 psi, we surfaced and took a compass

reading on the boat, descended again, and began our return trip. Shortly, we were right under the boat. I had about 1,200 psi and Lynda had 1,700 psi, so we swam the length of an old barge directly under the boat, turned around and came back to our starting point and began our ascent.

Imagine our surprise when we got to the surface and there was no boat. The only thing I could see in the distance was a light tower about 150 yards away. The surface swim to the tower was not fun as the water was rough and the 3-4 foot waves often flooded our snorkels. After arriving at the tower, we saw another dive boat in the distance and tried to attract its attention to no avail. We climbed onto the tower platform, receiving some lacerations when waves banged us into the barnacle-encrusted pillar.

The top of the platform consisted of a perimeter of I-beams with diagonal I-beams running to the center from the corners. In the center was a 6-foot square metal plate, with a derrick-like angle iron structure that went up 10-15 feet with a beacon light on top. At first we thought it would only be a short time before they noticed we were missing and they would return to

look for us. At least, at the end of the second dive they would notice we were not there. As we learned later, only two divers went in the water on the second dive and apparently they did not do a head count .

The wind picked up, and after the sun went down, it got downright cold. We passed the long night huddling together for warmth, now and then walking around the perimeter of the light derrick. Periodically, I used Lynda's dive light to flash an SOS toward shore.

After the sun rose the next morning, we hoped there would be dive or fishing boats coming out, but the water remained rough with 5-6 foot swells. We could see no boats. Late in the morning we saw a large cabin cruiser going south about a half mile east. We waved our arms frantically, but there was no sign that it saw us. Several hours later, we saw a sailboat traveling the same course, and we repeated our attempts to attract attention. Though we saw no signs they could see us — we both wear glasses on land — the crew did in fact see us and radioed the Coast Guard. About 45 minutes later a boat from the National Marine Sanctuary arrived to transport us back to Kelly's on the Bay, where the Aqua-Nuts boat docks.

To the boat crew, it should have been obvious that tanks were missing tanks. Before boarding the boat, a tank was set out on the dock for each diver. They instructed us to put our BC and regulator on the tank, and when they called our name, a staff member carried the set-up tank onboard and placed it in a slot next to another tank. What resulted was a final configuration of a set-up tank next to a "bare" tank for all the divers. They instructed us to stow our gear under the bench below our tanks. On the return trip, the crew should have noticed that there were two "bare" tanks standing alone above some gear bags under the bench. Normally divers will return their tanks to the same area they had stowed their gear. An alert

crew would have noticed that something seemed out of place .

It should have been obvious that our gear bags were still on the boat after the passengers had returned to the dock. In fact, our gear bags were still on the boat when we returned to Kelly's the next evening.

They did notice that we didn't turn in the BCs we rented, but this only led to a message on our home telephone answering machine in California, saying that since it was raining when the boat returned, we must have neglected to turn them in and would we please call to arrange to have them shipped back.

To the boat crew, it should have been obvious that they were missing tanks ... it should have been obvious that our gear bags were still on the boat.

A few hours after we were on the tower, Lynda's equipment broke away from where it had been secured and floated towards shore. Coincidentally, another dive operation found it about the same time we were being taken off the tower. Reportedly, the response by Kelly's staff when informed that some of their equipment had been found was that it must have been some stolen a week before. In my opinion, the only thing more blatantly obvious that there was a problem, in my opinion, would have been a dead body strapped in the BC.

We've learned a few lessons here: Never assume there will be a roll call to ascertain that all divers are back aboard. Aqua-Nuts did put on quite a show by taking a roll call before boarding and insisting that their staff load our equipment. There was no mention of after-dive check-in procedures. And, as in our experience elsewhere there was no other way

than a roll call, so we assumed' that there was a sufficient method of insuring our return trip. Before the boat leaves the dock, we now insist that a roll call be taken after every dive.

To meet our time constraints, we had been traveling light and not checking luggage. So we left our own BCs at home and rented. This would have been fine had we brought our safety equipment that we normally attach to our BC or carry in the pockets — a whistle, a safety sausage, or even a mirror:

Inform others of your plans and changes to those plans. We had intended to be diving in West Palm Beach, so our family and friends believed us to be there. Due to weather, we made a last-minute decision to dive in Key Largo. No one in the world, other than Aqua-Nuts, knew that we were on that boat. Now, we always notify a family member on land of when and where we will be diving and when we expect to be back. We call and check in with them when our dive is over.

To make sure you're not left at sea, insist on a roll call. This simple, almost fool-proof test to ensure all divers are accounted for, should never be skipped. We were lucky to have had a place to wait for help. Can everyone expect that six miles from shore?

Partner up with another team on the boat. One diver called this the 'boat-buddy system.' We have buddies for our mutual safety while diving. Why not ask another team to agree to make sure that you team in on the boat before departure, in exchange for mutual consideration? You can't assume that other divers you converse with on the way out will notice you're missing on the way home.

Observe extra equipment left on board. Don't be too shy to mention equipment or other items that seem out of place either before departing a site, on the return trip or on arrival at the dock. The crew can get 'busy' and miss these simple observations. You'd want the same courtesy extended to

you, if you were left behind.

* * * * *

Two months after the ordeal, the Evans completed their Advanced Open-Water Training in the cold, tough waters of Monterey, CA, and dived Fiji in June. When I asked Michael whether he had been fearful of diving again, he said, "Oh no, this was not a diving problem, it was a transportation problem. We're now very

vocal whenever we go on a dive boat." The Evans settled a civil claim against Aqua-Nuts and Ricardo Investments out of court. They provided *Undercurrent* their story and said "We appreciate anything you can do to alert other divers to the importance of insisting on a roll call at the end of each dive, as well as taking other steps to reduce the risk of being left behind by a dive boat."

-Ben Davison

Flotsam & Jetsam

What men say about cold water is true: "A water management problem in a dry suit that the underwear cannot be expected to manage is urine. The Canadian Navy uses adult incontinence diapers. This may seem a bit silly at first until you need them and then you realize how well they work. They also work for both sexes. Other navies have been known to use condoms that drain through a valve in the suit. These are obviously only good for men and have been known to slip off when the user gets cold." (Dave Eaton, Canada's Defence Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine (DCIEM).

Better than narcosis: A Frenchman visiting India thought he had discovered

a new use for scuba tanks, so he took two to Indonesia. When he arrived, security officers turned the valves and found them empty of air — of course they should be, when transported by plane — but they removed the valves anyhow and found 370 packets of hashish weighing 8.5 lbs. The French national told the judges that the tanks belonged to a friend in Bombay, and he knew nothing about the hashish. In fact he had used the tanks for diving several times before bringing them to Indonesia. The judges sentenced the 27-year-old to life in prison. There was no word about whether he got a hashish high while diving with loaded tanks.

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