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second stages would thus cost \$45 in labor.

Parts prices vary widely among brands and models. A three-stage kit (one first and two seconds) for most Sherwood regulators retails for around \$10, perhaps the lowest price in the business. Ten years of annual nonwarranty service would cost \$100 in parts, ignoring inflation. For a Sea Quest Mirage, the same service would run about \$220, while a Mares MR-22 Abyss would cost about \$340. A Sea Quest Century sealed first-stage kit alone costs \$40, bringing its ten-

year cost close to \$500. A pair of Scubapro D400s on an MK 15 first stage would run an impressive \$520. To those prices you can expect to add about \$450 in labor.

When buying either a new or a used regulator, determine the price of a nonwarranty service kit for each stage, even if you intend to have them overhauled annually. Parts costs do exceed labor costs for some regs. Buying a used regulator or overlooking an annual service date for a new reg can add hundreds of dollars to your diving bills over just a few years.

Delmar Mesa

technician can't find the right part, but 'here, this one looks almost like it.' The resulting problems may not happen until you're at depth. A technician has to have already worked on the reg before he or she can tell anything about it on a bench.

"Another good reason for regular servicing is that manufacturers sometimes modify components, replacing them with superior products. Even without use, regulator components can dry out and become defective. Yes, it's true that most regs will fail positively (free flow rather than cut off your air), but why take a chance? It's life support, and parts should be checked and replaced annually."

Some of Rudy's arguments are compelling, but I'm still not a hundred percent convinced that it's necessary to replace all those components every 12 months if I take good care of my regulator.

However, one of the IAST contentions is hard to argue with: that people who service underwater life support systems should be qualified. IAST points out that manufacturers offer courses lasting from a couple of hours to a day on how to service their regs, but as it stands now, anyone who wants to call himself a scuba technician is one. It's IAST's goal to set minimum standards for the training of scuba technicians and organize an international registry of scuba technicians and repair training facilities.

If this would mean that regulators would no longer be most prone to fail on the first dive after servicing, I'm for it.

John Q. Trigger

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# Regulator Service

## *Do I have to do it every year?*

Past experience tells me two things: (1) the mostly likely time a regulator will malfunction is on the first dive after it has been serviced, and (2) if I take good care of my reg, I can go for three seasons without service and never have a problem.

So if I dutifully take my regulator in for its annual service, does that mean that, when I get the little plastic bag back with a handful of parts that look perfectly fine, I've just shelled out 50 to 100 bucks for nothing? I called a buddy with a dive store who I knew would forgo the industry line and tell me what he thought. He did, but he also said he would like to remain anonymous.

"No, I don't service my regs annually. I think the annual thing got started back when O-rings were made of rubber. Now that they're made of more durable

material, I don't think it's as necessary. Manufacturers won't back off because of liability reasons, and most dive stores want the service business. When a customer who's an experienced diver brings in a reg, I can crank off the dust cap, look to see if it's clean, check the filter, look for salt crystals, snap it on the test bench, and check the cracking pressures. If it passes all of these tests, I say there's no reason to overhaul it."

Rudy Mola of the International Association of Scuba Technicians (IAST) has a very different view. "Of course you should do an annual checkup — it's a life-support system. You can't tell anything about a regulator by slapping it on a test bench. Some regs will even perform (for awhile) with the wrong parts. In a less than perfect world, a repair