

Is there one thing that would make diving safer?

It is a simple enough question and one would assume it has a simple enough answer. The reality is that there are a whole range of little things that you could and should do to both avoid incidents and resolve them as they occur.

For me a key message is proper buoyancy control but this relies on and is directly affected by proper weighting and trim, which are features of the Buoyancy Workshop soon to be released.

When all else fails however, there is one single action that can make a substantial change to the outcome of serious incidents. Far too many people have been alive and on the surface following an incident but then tragically sunk again. The simple removal of the weight belt could have significantly reduced the number of these incidents becoming fatal accidents. Underwater the consequences of weight belt release may be more serious in reducing the ability to control an ascent but DCI can be treated and the surface provides an unlimited supply of breathing gas.

Clare Peddie
BSAC Chairman

SHED THE LEAD

Covered previously in 'Safety Talk' the messages of 'Shed the Lead' bear revisiting.

Emergency Action

One factor that has clearly been implicated in the past, from the annual incident report and in addition highlighted by a number of Coroners Inquests and the diving Press, is that a very simple action could have resulted in the saving of a life.

Simply ditching the weight belt can secure a person on the surface whilst waiting for further assistance (see picture below for an illustration). Underwater is a little more of a judgment call, but it is a fact that ditching a weight belt will ensure a return to the surface where further rescue assistance can be provided and many people would still be alive today if they had followed this simple action.

The skill however, does require some practice to ensure that the weights are released clear of the body, so all divers could benefit from occasional practice in controlled conditions in shallow (no more than chest depth) water.



The picture above shows the diver on the left having ditched his weight belt being significantly higher in the water than his buddy.

Correct Weighting

Do you find you always have a sore back after diving, use much more gas than your buddy or than you used to, find air escaping from your neckseal or even find that whenever you stop finning, you immediately sink to the bottom?

All these are signs that you may well be over weighted. Many divers admit to knowing that they are over weighted and use it as an excuse to hold more air in their suits to give them more insulation. Many others have simply not recognised it to be a problem and the change often creeps up on them unnoticed, due to accumulation of additional equipment as their experience increases. Sometimes this can be the result of a sequence of changes, from sea to fresh water and back again, as divers forget to remove the extra weight required for seawater and then get used to the extra feel of excess weight and so 'feel' underweighted when going to the sea again and so add more unnecessary weight.

As a quick check "do you sink like a stone" once you start to dump air on a dive? If so this is a clear sign that you should check your weighting.

Overweighting is a phenomenon often identified by Instructors when students progress to more advanced courses such as Advanced Nitrox or Extended Range, where good buoyancy control is essential for safe conduct of decompression in mid water, (the record so far is 17lb of excess lead removed from one student on an Adv. Nitrox Course who subsequently admitted this was the first time he had understood what buoyancy control was all about!).

Proper weighting not only makes your diving safer, but also more comfortable and relaxed and therefore enjoyable. Please check your weighting regularly and especially when you change equipment.

Think SAFE – Dive SAFE

Jim Watson

BSAC Safety and Development manager

For more detail and information please visit www.bsac.org/page/45/diving-safety.htm