

## **NOAA SCIENTIFIC OR WORKING DIVER CERTIFICATION WHICH IS RIGHT FOR ME?**

In order to dive under NOAA auspices, divers must be certified to dive by the NOAA Diving Program (NDP) or be employed by an organization or institution for which NOAA has granted diving reciprocity. NOAA employees must be certified to dive by the NDP. NOAA has two certification classifications: *scientific* and *working* diver.

The purpose of this document is to explain the differences between these two classifications of divers so that NOAA personnel can determine which is more appropriate for their needs.

### ***Scientific Diver Certification***

#### Overview

As the title implies, the *scientific* certification is designed for those individuals needing to perform dives to collect scientific data. Examples include: collecting (water, bottom samples, flora and fauna, etc.), observing and documenting (including the use of cameras), and measuring and counting. Another way to describe this classification is “limited.” The tasks of a scientific diver are limited to observation and data gathering and are performed in advancement of science. If tools are used, they are limited to “light” hand tools (e.g., small hammers, pliers, screw drivers, chisels, pneumatic-power drills, etc.). Other ancillary equipment such as small lift bags (<50 pounds lifting capacity) and small air lifts can also be used if associated with data collection. Tasks typically associated with commercial diving, such as lifting heavy objects, construction, use of heavy hand or power tools, ship husbandry tasks are not authorized under the scientific diver classification. Tasks performed by scientific divers are exempt from the OSHA commercial diving regulations (i.e., 29 CFR, 1910).

#### Qualification Criteria

To qualify for a scientific diver certification, individuals must be previously certified scuba divers beyond the basic entry level (e.g., advanced open water, Divemaster, assistant instructor, instructor) by a recognized scuba diving certification agency (e.g., US Navy, NAUI, PADI, IANTD, SSI, TDI, YMCA, etc.). Candidates must also have completed a minimum of 25 dives; be current in CPR, First Aid, and oxygen administration training; pass a written examination (based on an advanced-level recreational scuba diving certification), a NOAA dive physical examination, and a swim test; and complete a checkout dive with a NOAA Unit Diving Supervisor, or their designee.

#### Issuance of Certification and Equipment

Individuals completing the above will be issued a certification letter, an ID card, and a NOAA Diving Manual. NOAA employees will automatically be entered into the NOAA Standardized Equipment Program (SEP) and issued all required dive equipment except dive masks. Masks are the responsibility of each individual, although some Programs

cover these costs. Likewise, scuba cylinders and weights are not provided via the SEP and are purchased by the Programs. Participation in the SEP has as initial, one-time \$400 enrollment fee that is used to “buy-in” to the program and help offset a small portion of the cost to fully outfit a diver. The SEP also has an annual maintenance fee that varies each year according to the number of participants in the SEP program. The fee for FY '05 was \$360 per diver which is paid by the diver’s unit. Contract divers are eligible to participate in the SEP if approved by their Programs.

### Maintenance of Certification

All NOAA divers are required to perform a minimum of 1 dive every 6 weeks in order to remain in an “authorized” status. Maintenance of certification also requires periodic completion and passing of a NOAA renewal dive physical examination – which is performed at age-based intervals, and continued CPR, First Aid, and Oxygen Administration training.

### ***Working Diver Certification***

#### Overview

The Working Diver certification is for those individuals that may need to perform either scientific or commercial diving tasks, or both. In comparison to the scientific classification, the working diver is “unlimited” by the tasks to be performed. Examples of working tasks include: ship husbandry (cleaning hulls, sea strainers, replacing zincs, unfouling a ship’s propeller), use of heavy power tools powered by pneumatics or hydraulics from the surface, lifting and positioning heavy objects weighing >50 pounds, locating and retrieving items, construction, and underwater cutting using exothermic cutting lances. Although working divers can perform both scientific and/or commercial diving tasks, when performing the latter, they are not exempt from the OSHA commercial diving regulations (i.e., 29 CFR, 1910) - thus requiring additional equipment and personnel beyond that required for scientific “exempt” tasks.

#### Qualification Criteria

To qualify for the working diver certification, individuals must successfully complete the NOAA 3-week working diver course (offered in May and September in Seattle and in Key West in January) or an equivalent training program (e.g., military or commercial diving school), or have documented experience in performing working dives. Candidates must have completed a minimum of 25 dives; be current in CPR, First Aid, and oxygen administration training; pass a written examination (based on an advanced-level recreational scuba diving certification), a NOAA dive physical examination, and a swim test; and complete a checkout dive with a NOAA Unit Diving Supervisor, or their designee.

Issuance of Certification and Equipment: Same as that for scientific diver.