

NOAA DIVING CERTIFICATIONS: WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

There are two primary diving certifications within NOAA: Scientific and Working. The main differences between the two are: 1) certification requirements, and 2) tasks that each are authorized to perform underwater. Specific requirements for both certifications are outlined below.

Scientific Diving Certification

Scope of Certification and Authorized Tasks:

- The Scientific Diving Certification was created for those NOAA employees¹ needing to dive strictly for scientific purposes. The tasks of a scientific diver are limited to those of an observer and data gatherer. Examples of such tasks include: measuring items, collecting samples, monitoring, surveying, documenting, and identifying. If tools are used, they are small and light in nature such as pliers or screwdrivers. Tasks traditionally associated with commercial diving (see Working Diver description below) are not authorized under the scientific diver certification. Dives performed by NOAA scientific divers are exempt from OSHA commercial diving regulations (29 CFR 1910).

Certification Prerequisites and Requirements:

- Prerequisites for certification include proof of: 1) a scuba diving certification above the basic entry level from a nationally-recognized diving certification agency², 2) current first aid, CPR and oxygen administration training, and 3) a minimum of 25 open water dives, 8 of which were in the previous 12 months, and at least 1 in the previous 6 weeks.
- Requirements for certification include successfully passing: 1) a NOAA swim test, 2) a NOAA diving physical exam, 3) the NOAA Scientific Diver written exam with a minimum score of 80%, and 4) an open water checkout dive with a NOAA Unit Diving Supervisor or their designee.
- Requirements for maintaining certification include: 1) completing a minimum of 1 dive every 6 weeks, 2) passing a renewal diving physical when required (aged-based timetable), and 3) submitting an annual medical history form.

Issuance of Diving Equipment: Upon certification, NOAA Scientific Divers³ are issued diving equipment via the Standardized Equipment Program (SEP) for which their units are charged a \$400 enrollment fee, plus an annual maintenance fee that is established yearly.

Working Diver Certification

Scope of Certification and Authorized Tasks:

The Working Diver Certification is a certification that authorizes NOAA employees to perform both scientific (see Scientific Diver description above) and commercial-oriented diving tasks. Examples of such tasks include: deploying, moving and retrieving heavy objects; locating submerged objects; using heavy hand or power tools; performing ship husbandry; inspecting, repairing, and cleaning underwater structures. These tasks are NOT exempt from OSHA commercial diving regulations and require compliance with additional standards and procedures.

Certification Prerequisites and Requirements:

Certification requirements include successfully completing the NOAA 3-week Working Diver Course or an equivalent civilian or military dive-training program. Award of certification based on prior work experience is considered on a case-by-case basis. In addition to the dive training requirements, candidates must also show proof of current first aid, CPR, and oxygen administration training, and pass a diving physical. The requirements for maintaining certification are identical to that of the Scientific Diver certification.

Issuance of Diving Equipment (Same procedures as for Scientific Divers outlined above)

¹ Non-NOAA personnel are also eligible for the NOAA Scientific Diving certification and must meet all the prerequisites and requirements outlined above.

² A minimum of 150 open-water dives may be substituted for an advanced diving certification.

³ Non-NOAA personnel are not eligible to receive SEP diving equipment.