



# NOAA *Background*

## The NOAA Diving Program

As an agency whose mission encompasses ocean and coastal research, one of NOAA's greatest assets is the NOAA Diving Program, headquartered at the NOAA Dive Center in Seattle, Washington.

The NOAA Diving Program, or NDP, trains and certifies scientists, engineers and technicians to perform the variety of tasks carried out underwater to support NOAA's mission. With more than 300 divers, NOAA has the largest complement of divers of any civilian federal agency. In addition, NOAA's reputation as a leader in diving and safety training has led to frequent requests from other governmental agencies to participate in NOAA diver training courses.

### A WORD ABOUT NOAA. . .

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducts research and gathers data about the global oceans, atmosphere, space, and sun, and applies this knowledge to science and service that touch the lives of all Americans.

NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment which sustains us all.

A Commerce Department agency, NOAA provides these services through five major organizations: the National Weather Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and numerous special program units. In addition, NOAA research and operational activities are supported by the Nation's seventh uniformed service, the NOAA Corps, a commissioned officer corps of men and women who operate NOAA ships and aircraft, and serve in scientific and administrative posts.

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NOAA divers work throughout the oceans and inland waters of the world in conditions varying from the crystal clear water of a pristine marine sanctuary to the murky and polluted water of a congested harbor. On any given day, NOAA divers may be seen deploying and retrieving scientific instruments, documenting the behavior of fish and other marine animals, performing emergency and routine ship repair and maintenance, assessing the impact of man on the environment, and locating and charting submerged objects. Recent projects have included dives deeper than 200 feet that require use of mixed gases. NDP is conducting ongoing dives on behalf of the National Ocean Service to the wreck of the *U.S.S. Monitor*—the nation's first iron-clad ship, which was sunk during the Civil War—to collect data that will be used to protect and preserve the historic site. For the National Marine Fisheries Service, NDP divers are studying the eating habits of the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, even lifting up rocks under which the seals have foraged to see what was on the menu for that day. Such "up close and personal" observations are not possible when using remotely operated vehicles.

The NDP is responsible for overseeing and managing all NOAA diving personnel, equipment and activities, and ensuring that all diving is performed in a safe and efficient manner. The NDP, the NOAA Diving Safety Board, and the NOAA Diving Medical Review Board all work together to accomplish these objectives and to ensure the availability of properly trained divers to meet NOAA's data acquisition requirements.

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## **Safety Comes First**

The NDP averages more than 10,000 dives per year, while consistently maintaining an excellent diving safety record. (99.97% safe dive statistic). This safety record is due to three guiding principles: 1) thorough training, 2) adherence to established standards and procedures, and 3) use of top-quality, well-maintained equipment. The NDP provides the means and leadership for adherence to these principles through its numerous training programs, administrative procedures and Standardized Equipment Program (SEP). The SEP issues, maintains, tests, and controls the quality of all NOAA diving equipment. Since its implementation in 1989, the program has increased diver safety significantly.

## **NOAA Diving Center**

The NOAA Diving Center functions as the administrative headquarters for the NOAA Diving Program and serves as the primary training facility within NOAA for diving and hyperbaric chamber operations.

Opened in 1989, the Center includes administrative offices, a modern classroom with full audiovisual capability, dive equipment repair and storage areas, a training tank (30 feet high by 15 feet wide), and three fully-functional hyperbaric chambers (84", 60", 42" dia.). Gas systems consist of a low-pressure air system for support of chamber operations and surface-supplied diving, plus high pressure air and Nitrox systems for scuba diving. Several boats, ranging in size from 14 to 26 feet in length, are available to support diving operations in Lake Washington, Lake Union and Puget Sound.

An L-shaped staging pier partially encloses a 30-foot deep training basin in Lake Washington, with deeper depths (>200 feet) located within one mile of the Center, providing excellent facilities for open-water training of divers.

For nearly 50 years, NOAA and its predecessor agencies have been engaged in undersea research. Many of the lessons learned and technologies developed during this time have been adopted by the recreational, scientific, and military diving communities, thus benefiting divers everywhere.

The experience of seasoned NOAA divers is reflected through their significant contributions to the *NOAA Diving Manual*, a comprehensive reference specifically designed for the diving professional. The manual was first written in 1975; the fourth edition has just been completed and contains new user-friendly Nitrox decompression tables developed by NDP that enables divers to stay underwater longer. The diversity of the manual ranges from polluted water diving procedures to saturation and underwater habitat diving.

The NOAA Diving Manual contains USN Air Decompression Tables as well as USN, Royal Navy, and COMEX Recompression Treatment Tables. This invaluable aid to divers will be available in February 2001 through the National Technical Information Service Web site at <http://www.ntis.gov/product/noaadive.htm>, or by contacting Best Publishing Company, 2355 North Steves Blvd., P.O. Box 30100, Flagstaff, Arizona 86003; Tel: (800) 468-1055, ext. 10, or (520) 527-1055; Fax: (520) 526-0370; E-mail: [divebooks@bestpub.com](mailto:divebooks@bestpub.com) ☺

**For more information visit NDP's Web site at <http://www.ndc.noaa.gov> or contact Jeanne Kouhestani, Office of Marine and Aviation Operations public affairs, at (301) 713-3431, ext. 220.**