

Research and Sponsored Projects Manual (RSP)

RSP 207: Standards for Scientific Diving

Effective: 4/6/2000

Revised: 11/1/2024

Purpose

To provide policy level standards for underwater research activities

Sources

Code of Federal Regulations (29 CFR 1910.401 Subpart T, Appendix B)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

American Academy of Underwater Sciences (AAUS)

AAUS Diving Safety Manual

Knowledge Enterprise (KE)

Applicability

All research and related activities involving underwater diving for which ASU is a responsible participant, regardless of whether the activity will receive funding or not

Background

Several research groups at ASU engage in underwater research activities involving diving. To promote diving safety, ASU maintains an institutional membership in the American Academy of Underwater Sciences (AAUS), which has established standards and certification requirements for scientific diving. AAUS member organizations help protect themselves from possible fines and civil suits by their commitment to meeting AAUS requirements and adherence to a set of standards recognized as the “standard of practice” within the scientific diving community.

Policy

Federal law defines scientific diving as diving performed solely as a necessary part of a scientific, research, or educational activity by employees whose sole purpose for diving is to perform scientific research tasks. Scientific diving does not include tasks associated with commercial diving such as rigging heavy objects underwater, inspection of pipelines, construction, demolition, cutting or welding, or the use of explosives.

To remain exempt from the regulations that govern commercial diving, including those of OSHA, scientific diving on behalf of ASU must meet the following conditions:

1. ASU must maintain a diving safety manual with procedures covering all ASU diving operations. The manual must include procedures for emergency care, recompression, and evacuation and the criteria for diver training and certification.

2. ASU must maintain a Diving Control Board, with the majority of its members being active scientific divers. The board may approve and monitor diving projects, review and revise the diving safety manual, assure compliance with the manual, certify the depths to which a diver has been trained, recommend disciplinary action for unsafe practices (under applicable university policies), and require compliance with safe diving practices. The Vice President for the Knowledge Enterprise or his/her designee will appoint the members of the board. In turn, the Diving Control Board shall appoint the Diving Safety Officer, who shall be a qualified SCUBA diving instructor.
3. The purpose of the project using scientific diving must be the advancement of science.
4. The tasks of a scientific diver must be those of an observer and data gatherer. Construction and trouble-shooting tasks traditionally associated with commercial diving are not included within scientific diving.
5. Scientific divers, based on the nature of their activities, must use scientific expertise in studying the underwater environment and therefore, must be scientists or scientists-in-training.

All scientific diving by or under the direction of ASU researchers must comply with this policy and currently applicable AAUS Diving

Control Standards. These standards are available at <http://www.aaus.org>. (Members log in using membership information.)

For ASU's purposes, the Diving Control Board shall have the power to make local revisions in the [Sea Devils Scientific Diving Standards Manual](#) as long as such revisions are compliant with AAUS Standards. The manual can be found at [Office of Research Integrity & Assurance website](#).