

EFFECTIVE
1 February 2008



MINIMUM COURSE CONTENT

FOR

Entry-Level Rescue Diver Certification

As Approved By

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Recreational Scuba Training Council (RSTC)

Minimum Course Content

for

Entry-Level Rescue Diver Certification

1. Scope and Purpose

This standard provides minimum course content requirements for instruction leading to entry-level rescue diver certification in recreational diving with scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus).

However, these requirements should under no conditions be considered to define a level of optimum rescue diver training. Instructional programs that extend beyond these requirements should, in fact, be encouraged. Some states, provinces or countries may have additional regulations for rescue diver training. Instructors should be aware of requirements in their local areas and adhere to the additional protocols when conducting training.

The requirements of this standard are meant to be comprehensive, but general in nature. That is, the standard presents all the subject areas essential for recreational rescue diver certification, but it does not give a detailed listing of the skills and information encompassed by each area. Training organizations shall publish detailed course outlines that meet this standard, which would include specific techniques and recommendations for teaching. Further, this standard is general in nature, applicable to recreational diving. It is not intended to meet requirements for professional dive rescue and water safety teams. Courses taught under these general standards can, however, provide a solid foundation for additional rescue training. Rescue Divers should be encouraged to practice their rescue skills often after certification to foster skill retention and familiarity, and to take rescue refresher courses.

Although the information categories are outlined in what may appear to be a logical sequence, the outline shall not be viewed as a lesson plan. That is, the order in which the information is presented in this standard, while logical as a framework for the basic requirements of this standard, does not necessarily define the sequence of a class lesson plan. Similarly, the requirements presented in this standard do not indicate the emphasis that should be placed upon a particular subject area, or the manner in which subjects are to be taught. Rather, course outlines, lesson plans, and other training aids prepared by training organizations responsible for recreational diver training shall be used as guidelines for the sequencing and emphasis of course content requirements presented in this standard. Decisions as to sequencing and emphasis are at the discretion of the certifying instructor within the requirements of the instructor's training organization, to be made within the context of environmental factors, student characteristics, and other relevant considerations.

Rescue diver training serves to help the recreational diver understand common causes of dive emergencies; helps the diver avoid dive accidents; and prepares the diver to give assistance to another diver in trouble. It is the intent of this standard that divers will receive rescue diver training fundamentals from an instructor (see definition).

2. Definitions

certification. A Certification Card (“C-Card”) documenting that a student has completed all requirements of a rescue diving certification course. This verification is issued by training organizations upon receipt of an instructor’s written confirmation of satisfactory completion of all course requirements by the student, as documented in the student’s log/training record.

certified assistant. An individual who is currently certified by a training organization to assist an instructor. By the intent of this standard, all activities of a certified assistant in rescue diver courses shall be under the supervision of an instructor. Certified assistants may also serve as role-playing dive accident victims in rescue training scenarios. Completion of formal training in planning, management and control of diving activities, first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and diver rescue techniques is required before a certified assistant may assume responsibility for any student or students during open water training dives, as defined in this document. The certified assistant shall also have passed a written examination demonstrating certified assistant-level knowledge, as required by the training organization. (See the RSTC Recreational Dive Supervisor and RSTC Assistant Scuba Instructor certification standards for details).

confined water. Any body of water that offers conditions similar to those of a swimming pool.

instructor. An individual who is currently certified and sanctioned by a training organization to teach open water scuba diving and to authorize the issuance of open water certification. In order to be sanctioned, the instructor shall meet the annual renewal requirements of the sanctioning organization. An instructor shall have completed formal training in lesson preparation, planning and delivery of lecture, pool/confined water skills and open water skills teaching presentations, in addition to completing the training requirements of a certified assistant (see definition). The instructor shall also have passed a written examination demonstrating instructor-level knowledge, as required by the training organization. (See the RSTC Recreational Scuba Instructor certification standards for details).

minimum instructional diving system. The equipment required to be worn by students while performing the skills listed in 4.8. This equipment includes, as a minimum: fins, mask, snorkel, cylinder and valve, buoyancy control device with low-pressure inflator, regulator, alternate air source (active scuba/air delivery system), submersible pressure gauge, timing device, depth gauge, weight ballast system, and exposure suit (e.g., wetsuit, dry suit, etc. if appropriate). A compass/direction monitor is desirable, but not required.

rescue diver course. A course of scuba training leading to rescue diver certification, issued by a training organization. Successful completion of a course that meets the requirements of this standard prepare an individual to recognize common causes of dive emergencies; to lend assistance to another diver in need; to act appropriately in a diving emergency; and to avoid diving accidents.

open water rescue training. These are supervised, open water scuba training experiences to fulfill certification requirements. Training shall consist of the exercises outlined in 4.8 and as required by the training organization. Each dive shall include, as minimum: (1) a briefing; (2) preparation to dive; (3) an entry; (4) at least 15 minutes at depths not to exceed 60 feet (18 metres); (5) an exit; (6) a debriefing; (7) logging the dive in student’s personal log book .

supervision (open water). The levels of supervision apply as outlined in Section 5. If local regulations specify a higher level of supervision than outlined in the RSTC Standards, instructors should follow these regulations to ensure compliance with local government requirements.

3. Eligibility for Certification

To qualify for rescue diver certification, a student shall meet the following minimum prerequisites:

3.1 Age. The student shall be at least 15 years of age; there is no upper limit. Students under the minimum age who can meet performance requirements may qualify for special certification, as specified by the training organization's standards.

3.2 Open water diver certification. The student shall have proof of open water diver certification as prerequisite to the course.

3.3 Emergency care training.

3.3.1 CPR/first aid. The student shall have proof of CPR and first aid training prior to becoming certified as a rescue diver. Preferably, CPR and first aid training occurs before or in conjunction with rescue diver training.

3.3.2 Emergency oxygen use. The student shall be trained in the practical use of emergency oxygen use during or prior to the rescue diver course when not prohibited by local law.

3.3.3 Automated External Defibrillator (AED). It's recommended that the student have AED training during or prior to the rescue diver course.

3.4 Medical History/Statement. Applicants to a course shall complete the medical history/statement form required by the training organization prior to in-water activities. Applicants shall comply with all stipulations thereon before continuing in-water training. It is required that applicants with out-of-the-ordinary medical histories be approved, without conditions or restrictions, as medically fit for diving by a licensed medical practitioner prior to engaging in water activities. In no event will medical approval be accepted when the person signing the approval is the participating individual.

3.5 Acknowledgment and Assumption of Risk. Applicants to a course shall be informed of the inherent risks of scuba and shall agree to sign appropriate forms acknowledging and assuming those risks prior to participating in water activities. These forms may include, but are not to be limited to: liability release; waiver and release of liability; affirmation and liability release; assumption of risk; limitation of liability; safe diving practices; standards for safety; statement of understanding; etc.

3.6 Knowledge. When available in the student's primary language, the student shall use a rescue diver training manual approved by the training organization to study from during the course. The student shall demonstrate rescue diver level knowledge of scuba diving by taking and passing an examination. Documentation of the examination shall be retained by the instructor or facility for each student for a minimum of five years, or longer if stipulated by local legal requirements. This examination shall test student knowledge of common causes of diver stress and dive emergencies (as listed in 4.2), identifying a diver in need (4.3), dive rescue procedures and injury treatment (4.4), first aid supplies and dive rescue equipment, (4.5), managing a dive emergency (4.6), rescuer health and safety (4.7), and in-water rescue skills (4.8), to be presented in the course and as specified by the training organization. The student shall also prepare an emergency assistance plan (4.6.5), including steps of emergency management for a dive site as specified by the instructor and the training organization.

3.7 Rescue Skills. The student shall satisfactorily demonstrate to an instructor the rescue skills required by the training organization and as outlined in 4.8. The instructor shall follow the appropriate in-water training parameters in conducting the rescue skills, as required by the training organization and outlined in Section 5.

4. Minimum Course Content

The course shall consist of the topics and rescue skills required by the training organization and as outlined in this section.

4.1 Introduction. The following information should be made available to students before or during the first class meeting.

- (1) Certification requirements (see Section 3)
- (2) Class requirements
 - (a) Cost
 - (b) Insurance options/requirements
 - (c) Contractual agreement
- (3) Scope of course
 - (a) Content
 - (b) Limitations of eventual qualification
- (4) Equipment requirements
- (5) Course procedures

4.2 Common causes of stress and dive emergencies

- 4.2.1 Equipment related problems (Including overweighting and when it's appropriate to ditch weights)
- 4.2.2. Temperature Related Problems (reference first aid training)
 - (1) Heat exhaustion
 - (2) Heat Stroke
 - (3) Shock
 - (4) Hypothermia (including rewarming procedures)
- 4.2.3 Overexertion
- 4.2.4 Panic
- 4.2.5 Pressure-related injuries
 - (1) Decompression sickness
 - (2) Arterial gas embolism
 - (3) Other lung overexpansion injuries
- 4.2.6 Near drowning, drowning
- 4.2.7 Aquatic life
- 4.2.8 Environmental conditions

4.3 Identifying a dive emergency or diver in need (both on the surface and underwater)

- 4.3.1 Recognizing signs of stress
 - (1) Physical stress
 - (2) Psychological stress
 - (3) Perceptual narrowing
- 4.3.2 Recognizing characteristics of a tired diver
- 4.3.3 Recognizing characteristics of a panicked diver

4.4 Dive rescue procedures and treatment of injuries

- 4.4.1 Self rescue techniques
- 4.4.2 First Aid for common Aquatic Life injuries
- 4.4.3 Nonswimming assists/rescues
- 4.4.4 Critical Incident Stress
- 4.4.5 First aid for pressure-related injuries
 - (1) Decompression sickness
 - (2) Arterial gas embolism
 - (3) Other lung overexpansion injuries
- 4.4.6 Near-drowning, drowning and treatment
- 4.4.7 Assisting a responsive diver at the surface and underwater
- 4.4.8 Surfacing an unresponsive diver
- 4.4.9 Egress with a responsive and unresponsive diver
- 4.4.10 Equipment removal considerations
- 4.4.11 In-water rescue breathing techniques for the nonbreathing diver
- 4.4.12 Missing Diver procedures and considerations, including search patterns.

4.5 First aid supplies and dive rescue equipment. The value and use of each of the following are covered in the rescue diver knowledge development and in practical application as required by the training organization.

- 4.5.1 First Aid kit
- 4.5.2 Pocket mask/barrier devices
- 4.5.3 Emergency Oxygen (see 4.8-19).
 - (1) Benefits to the diver
 - (2) Various oxygen delivery systems
 - (3) Legality and oxygen use risks
- 4.5.4 Automated External Defibrillator.
- 4.5.5. Use of visual and audible signaling devices. Student or instructor demonstrates purpose and use of both visual and audible signaling devices.
- 4.5.6 Special Equipment

4.6 Managing a dive emergency

- 4.6.1 Site safety assessment
- 4.6.2 Scene management (including rescue team management)
- 4.6.3 Neurological exam procedures
- 4.6.4 Evacuation and professional treatment
 - (1) Emergency Medical Services
 - (2) Hyperbaric chamber--value to the victim of a dive accident
- 4.6.5 Students must prepare an emergency assistance plan, including steps of emergency management
- 4.6.6 Elements of a written report of an incident
 - (1) Fact recording
- 4.6.7 Equipment retention following an incident

4.7 Rescuer health and safety

- 4.7.1 Risks to the rescuer
- 4.7.2 Physical conditioning
- 4.7.3 The need for keeping your rescue and emergency care skills up-to-date.

4.8 Open Water Scuba Rescue Skills. These open water scuba skills are to be performed while diving in the open water, wearing a minimum instructional scuba diving system. Each student will demonstrate an appropriate procedure for:

- 4.8.1 Cramp release
- 4.8.2 Establishing buoyancy at the surface (self and for another diver)
- 4.8.3 Airway control
- 4.8.4 Supplying air to a diver simulating out-of-air -- Alternate air source use
- 4.8.5 Overcoming vertigo
- 4.8.6 Responding correctly to a tired diver at the surface and underwater
- 4.8.7 Responding correctly to a panicked diver at the surface and underwater
- 4.8.8 Non-swimming assists
- 4.8.9 Water entry when responding to an emergency
- 4.8.10 Swimming assists
- 4.8.11 At least two methods of diver tows
- 4.8.12 Egresses (both responsive and unresponsive diver)
- 4.8.13 Responding to a diver simulating overexertion
- 4.8.14 Conducting underwater Search patterns
- 4.8.15 Equipment removal techniques
- 4.8.16 Surfacing an unresponsive diver (see 5.2.4).
- 4.8.17 In-water rescue techniques for the nonbreathing diver
- 4.8.18 Administering emergency oxygen (where not prohibited by local law)
- 4.8.19 Various scenario practices

5. In-water Training Parameters

It is consistent with Section 1, Scope and Purpose, that during any in-water training activities the instructor must be present.

5.1 Pool/Confined Water Training Parameters. Students may receive their initial training of each scuba rescue skill in the pool/confined water before demonstrating them in open water.

5.2 Open-Water Training Parameters. For certification, students shall satisfactorily perform and complete skills as specified in 4.8 in the open water according to the procedures required by the training organization and as outlined in this section.

5.2.1 The use of a surface support-station with dive flag is encouraged when conducting underwater skills. Visually marking the surface skills area with surface markers/flags is also recommended or required when local law dictates.

5.2.2 The maximum number of students for open-water training is eight students per instructor. Four additional students for each certified assistant may be added. The scuba instructor shall limit the number of students per scuba instructor where environmental conditions are less than ideal, for example where underwater visibility is poor or there is significant water movement. The scuba instructor may also use additional aids to improve safety such as ascent lines, surface support stations or safety scuba divers.

5.2.3 During some surface rescue skill portions of rescue training in open water, students and/or instructors will not be wearing a complete minimum instructional scuba diving system.

5.2.4 All dives shall be conducted during daylight hours* at depths no greater than 60 feet (18 metres). Surfacing an unresponsive diver (4.8.16) shall be conducted at depths no greater than 30 feet (9 metres). Dives shall not be conducted in any situation where direct vertical access to the surface is not possible. Aquatic plants are not considered an overhead obstruction.

***Exceptions are allowed when artificial light permanently installed at the dive site is sufficient to simulate daylight diving conditions and is approved by the training organization**

**For more information, contact:
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Appendix A

RSTC Members

IDEA

International Diving Educators Association
P.O. Box 8427
Jacksonville, FL 32239 USA
1-904-744-5554 Fax: 1-904-743-5425
Email: info@ideascuba.com

PADI

Professional Association of Diving Instructors
30151 Tomas Street
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688-2125 USA
1-949-858-7234 Fax: 1-949-267-1266
Email: Julie.taylor.sanders@padi.com or jeff.nadler@padi.com

PDIC

Professional Diving Instructors Corporation
1015 River Street
Scranton, PA 18505 USA
1-570-342-9434 Fax: 1-570-342-6030
Email: info@pdic-intl.com

SDI

Scuba Diving International
18 Elm Street
Topsham, ME 04086 USA
1-207-729-4201 Fax: 1-207- 729-4453
Email: worldhq@tdisdi.com

SSI

Scuba Schools International
2619 Canton Court
Ft. Collins, CO 80525 USA
1-970-482-0883 Fax: 1-970-482-6157
Email: wdevore@divessi.com

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