



## EPA Guidance Notes

### **Using 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Providers for SCUBA Based Activities**

#### **Purpose**

This document is designed to provide EPA Members and Aspirant Members with guidance on some key considerations to take into account when compiling organisational policy and operating procedures pertaining to team members who will be taking part in SCUBA based activities on overseas expeditions.

Due to the market share, this document will focus on international PADI dive centres when discussing ratings and imposed standards. If, as a company, you decide to use an alternate organisation then the principles will still be relevant but specific standards will need to be verified.

Please also note that standards within this industry do change at short notice and so the governance within this document, although accurate at the time of writing, may change. It is therefore worthwhile contacting the governing body directly before sending a trip overseas.

The checklist below summarises the main points to consider when evaluating the suitability and safety of a SCUBA Diving provider. The accompanying notes, where relevant, detail the associated standards that will need to be considered when deciding if the provider is suitable along with other pertinent points to consider.

Please note that this document aims to guide the individual in to making an informed decision but that the responsibility of that decision rests solely with the Expedition Provider and not EPA. It is also the responsibility of the Expedition Provider to either ensure that their own liability insurance will cover the activities of the 3rd party provider OR that the 3rd party provider has their own suitable coverage in place.

All diving needs to be conducted in compliance with the standards set out by the governing body, e.g. PADI.

## Guidance

Providers should ensure robust due diligence checks are completed for all dive providers covering the registration and rating of the centre, the qualifications of staff, the equipment, emergency procedures and access to decompression facilities as well as the expected conditions of the dive. It is important that dive sites are chosen based on the experience and capabilities of the students as some areas may only be suitable for very experienced divers. An example checklist is provided in Annex A with additional points to consider found in Annex's D, E, F and G

Providers should only use registered dive centres, a guide to checking them can be found in Annex B

When undertaking training courses, the minimum qualification for the instructor is a PADI Open Water Scuba Instructor or equivalent. However, a dive guide can be used if everyone in the group is already a qualified diver. In this case the minimum qualification is a PADI Divemaster or equivalent. A guide to checking can be found in Annex B and Annex G shows comparable qualifications across other organisations.

Providers should ensure sufficient insurance is in place for the nature and depth of the proposed dive activities. See Annex F for additional points to consider.

The provider must also ensure that all participants are medically fit and safe to dive. It is worth noting that overseas providers will not necessarily adhere to UK guidance and so further checks may be necessary, see Annex I for more information.

## Annex A - Checklist

<b>Registration and Rating (Including public reviews)</b>			
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Is the provider a registered Dive Centre?			
Is the provider a PADI 5 star centre (or equivalent if using an alternate governing body)?			
Does the provider have good recent reviews on public review sites such as TripAdvisor?			
Has the centre had any incidents within the last 5 years?			
<b>Qualifications of staff</b>			
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Do the dive guides hold professional qualifications (PADI Divemaster or higher)?			
<b>Dive conditions and distance from shore</b>			
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Are the proposed dive sites of a suitable difficulty for the individuals? Consider temperature, depth, drop-offs, currents, entry and exit conditions and experience of individuals.			
If conducting shore dives, is the surface swim within the capabilities of the group?			
If conducting boat dives, is the boat in serviceable condition with all necessary safety equipment? This includes life jackets, suitable entry and exit points, flares, radio etc.			
Do the guides give detailed briefings on dive sites, profiles, conditions and flora and fauna?			
Does the ratio of guides to individuals take into account the PADI standards and also sensible adjustments for the experience levels of the individuals and local dive conditions such as current, swell, and visibility?"			

<b>Equipment and Servicing</b>			
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Are the regulators in good working order, free from leaks, no obvious signs of damage to the housings (other than superficial scratches) and no damage to the mouth pieces?			
Has it been more than a year or 100 dives since the regulator was last serviced?			
Have the cylinders been visually tested within the last 12 months and hydrostatically tested within the last 5 years?			
Are the cylinders and valves in good condition with no obvious scratches, dents or signs of rust?			
Are the BCD's in good working order and condition with no leaks?			
BCD's: Does the centre have a good range of sizes that are suitable for the students?			
Has the compressor been serviced within the last 12 months?			
Has the air been tested at regular intervals?			
Does the quality of air meet the required specifications?			
Are the exhaust vent and air intake valves for the compressor suitably far apart and in non-confined spaces?			
Are the filters changed regularly and in compliance with the manufacturers guidelines?			
Does the centre use pre-packed filters?			
If using petrol engines to run the compressor, do the filters have a carbon monoxide filter within them?			
Is there a service record for the equipment mentioned above and were the services carried out by suitably qualified individuals?			

<b>Oxygen and Emergency Procedures</b>			
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Do the dive guides give suitable briefings for re-call procedures, missing buddy and common hand signs?			
Is there a suitable amount of oxygen immediately available?			
Is the nearest Recompression chamber a suitable distance away?			
Is it manned 24hrs a day by qualified and competent staff?			
Will it hold two casualties at once?			
Would the casualty have to be flown to the chamber?			
Is there an alternate form of transport to the chamber?			
Do you have to cross an international border to get to the chamber?			
Does the provider have suitable first aid facilities on site? i.e. vinegar for stings and hot water for protein based venoms?			
<b>Insurance and Medical</b>			
Is the maximum depth that the individual's insurance will allow them to dive to suitable for the proposed activity?			
Does the provider have 3 <sup>rd</sup> party liability insurance?			
Is diving covered under the Expedition Providers insurance?			
Are the individuals all medically fit to dive?			

## Annex B - Checking a Dive Providers Registration (PADI)

To check a dive centres registration through PADI, visit their website [www.padi.com](http://www.padi.com) and click on the 'Dive Shops' tab at the top of the page. From here you can search by area to initially find out where the nearest centres to the expedition are, or you can search for a specific shop to check their status. Although PADI have many classifications for their Dive Centres and Resorts in practice there are 3 main ratings:

- PADI 5 Star IDC/CDC
- PADI 5 Star Dive Centre/Resort
- PADI Dive Centre/Resort

If a provider is a genuine PADI centre/resort, then they will be listed on this website.

## Annex C – Checking Dive Guide Qualifications


The dive centre will hold all the relevant qualifications of its instructors/guides on site. If they are unable to provide proof of certification, then the centre should not be used. See the two examples below of acceptable proof of qualifications. Fig 1. Is an example of a PADI Divemaster card and Fig 2. Shows an online 'ProChek' that can be done through the providers PADI Pro's account. This is an instant check that can be done from any computer with an internet connection.




Figure 1 - PADI certification card

**Tristan Brown** **Member Number: 647474**

---

**PADI Rating: Divemaster** **Authorized to Teach:** 

**Renewed:** 

**Renew Year: 2017**

---

**Wednesday, March 22, 2017**

[Check another member](#)

If you feel that this information is incorrect, please contact the Member Service Department at one of the PADI offices listed below.

Figure 2 - Online 'ProChek' to verify a professional divers status

The minimum qualification that a PADI professional diver must hold to take a group of qualified divers is the PADI Divemaster. If the group are not already qualified divers, then there should be a PADI Instructor with the group at all times. There are a variety of levels of PADI Instructor, but the most common are the Open Water Scuba Instructor (OWSI) or the Master Scuba Diver Trainer (MSDT). These are the first two levels of instructor and will be more than suitable for taking individuals diving or training them up to PADI Divemaster. For an instructor to train an individual to be an instructor then they must have a higher qualification themselves.

## Annex D - Equipment and Servicing

### Regulators

- Regulators should be serviced every 12 months as a minimum however some manufacturers do recommend that they are either serviced annually or every 100 dives, whichever comes first.
- In order to service a regulator, the individual must hold an in-date technician course for the specific manufacturer of the kit that is being used. E.g. a ScubaPro technician is not qualified to service Mares regulators. Another common misconception is that ASSET trained individuals can service all makes of regulators. Again, this is not the case. Even though they will have a high level of knowledge they must still complete a manufacturer specific course.

### Cylinders

- In terms of the approved servicing guidelines for cylinders, legally they should be hydrostatically tested every 5 years and visually tested every 2.5 years. However, as an industry wide standard of best practice all cylinders should be visually inspected every 12 months

### BCD's

- Although there is not a widely accepted service schedule for BCD's they should have regular checks done on them to ensure that they are of

suitable quality with no leaks and that the dump valves are in good working order and do not stick.

#### Compressors

- Compressors should be serviced to the manufacturers guidelines but common practice for this is every 12 months.
- Air checks. According to BS EN 12021 'A competent person should test the quality of air supplied for breathing apparatus at least once every 3 months. More frequent tests should be conducted if contamination is foreseeable within this three-month period.' PADI Europe regulations for dive centres do not specify any frequency for air testing but simply say that at any given time the air must adhere to the following standards:

Oxygen 20-22%	Carbon monoxide 10 ppm (max) <b>3 ppm (max)</b>
Carbon dioxide 1000 ppm (max) <b>500 ppm (max)</b>	Oil (mist and vapour) 5mg/cubic meter (max) <b>0.5 mg/m<sup>3</sup></b>
No pronounced odour	Total hydrocarbon content 25 ppm (max)

Figures in red above are the equivalent maximum values under BS EN 12021.

In practice, it is very difficult to find a dive centre in a developing country that will stick to the standards outlined in BS EN 12021 and so it is up to the provider to ensure that they are satisfied with the frequency of tests and the quality of the air provided by the dive centre.

#### Annex E - Oxygen

Due to the nature of diving incidents it is advised that when looking at the amount of oxygen available it should be enough to support **two** divers on continuous flow at 15ltr per min to either the nearest medical facility where supplies can be replenished, or to the nearest recompression chamber.

#### Annex F - CASEVAC by Air

It is worth noting that if a casualty is suspected of having a decompression related issue and needs to be evacuated to the chamber by air, then a maximum flight altitude of 800ft/244m should not be exceeded unless aircraft safety is compromised (information received from Diving Disease and Research Centre, Plymouth)

#### Annex G - Insurance

Many insurance companies will not cover diving beyond 30m. It may therefore be down to the Expedition Provider to impose a maximum depth limit to the students.

#### Annex H - Qualification Comparison Table

BSAC	PADI Equivalent
Ocean Diver or Club Diver	Open Water Diver
Sport Diver	Open Water Diver

Sport Diver w/ at least 20 logged dives	Advanced Open Water Diver
Dive Leader	Rescue Diver
Advanced Diver	Divemaster or IDC Candidate
Club Instructor	IDC Candidate
Open Water Instructor	IDC Candidate
Advanced Instructor	IDC Candidate

<b>CMAS</b>	<b>PADI Equivalent</b>
CMAS 1 Star Diver	Open Water Diver
CMAS 2 Star Diver (with verification of Night and Navigation dive)	Rescue Diver
CMAS 3 Star Diver	Divemaster or IDC Candidate
CMAS 1 Star Instructor	IDC Candidate
CMAS 2 Star Instructor	IDC Candidate

<b>SSI</b>	<b>PADI Equivalent</b>
SSI Open Water	Open Water Diver
SSI Advanced open Water/ Advanced Adventurer	Advanced Open Water Diver
SSI Stress & Rescue Techniques	Rescue Diver
SSI Master Diver	Rescue Diver
SSI Dive Con	Divemaster
SSI O/W / Dive Con Instructor	IDC Candidate if instructor certified for 6 months.

<b>NAUI</b>	<b>PADI Equivalent</b>
NAUI Scuba Diver	Open Water Diver
Advanced Scuba Diver	Advanced Open Water Diver
NAUI Master Scuba Diver	Rescue Diver
NAUI Divemaster	Divemaster
Scuba Instructor	IDC Candidate

<b>SAA</b>	<b>PADI Equivalent</b>
Club Diver	Open Water Diver
Club Diver (with at least 20 logged dives and Experience in Deep and Navigation)	Advanced Open Water Diver
Dive Leader (with at least 20 logged dives)	Advanced Open Water Diver
Dive Leader (with Diver Rescue)	Rescue Diver
Dive Supervisor (with Diver Rescue)	Divemaster

Assistant and Club Instructor (with Diver Rescue)	IDC Candidate
SAA Regional Instructor	IDC Candidate

<b>HSE</b>	<b>PADI Equivalent</b>
Level 2	Open Water Diver
Level 3	Advanced Open Water Diver
Level 4 (dependant on specialities)	Rescue Diver
	Divemaster

<b>IDSA (Commercial)</b>	<b>PADI Equivalent</b>
Level 1	Open Water Diver
Level 2 (with PPB and table specialties)	Advanced Open Water Diver

### **Annex I - Medical Clearance**

It is important to be aware that commercial dive centres operating overseas are unlikely to be aware of UKSDMC (UK Sports Diving Medical Council) advice on determining fitness to dive. Most will simply accept a signed PADI medical form from a non specialist GP as sufficient evidence for fitness to dive. It is recommended that EPA members consider additional checks for example ensuring that an exercise spirometry test is carried out where a participant currently suffers from asthma (as per the PADI guidelines) and that they request input into the screening process from a medic with hyperbaric medicine expertise.