

BUDDY CHECKS

Buddy checks are a common aspect of recreational diving. All the recreational agencies are in agreement on the need to teach the use of a buddy check. In technical diving, on the other hand, the use of a buddy check is much more variable.

At one extreme there are divers who dive without a buddy and so no buddy check is possible. Then there are divers who dive with a buddy but adopt a self sufficient attitude and so just carry out a self check. In the middle are the divers who will give each other a quick check over. At the other extreme there are divers who go through a very specific and detailed and buddy check.

Many experienced divers say that they have reached a level of competence that they don't need to do buddy checks. Unfortunately they are then leaving themselves open to complacency. I have seen very experienced divers who have;

- Forgotten their weightbelts
- Forgotten to turn on their gas
- Forgotten their fins
- Left their drysuits unzipped
- Forgotten to connect their dry suit inflator
- Clipped their dry suit inflate over their long hose
- Connected their harness waist strap over their long hose
- Clipped their stage over their long hose
- Clipped stages in the wrong places
- Forgotten their dive timer/dive computer

Any one of these can be enough to cause a serious problem, cause the diver to abort the dive or even just miss slack water while the problem is resolved. With all the time and effort that goes into a technical dive it's well worth trying to avoid these sorts of problems.

Smart technical divers have their own mental checklist so that they can ensure they are fully ready for a dive but then also carry out a buddy check to make sure nothing is missed.

The buddy check will include kit but for a regular buddy you will have less need to explain the details of each piece of kit as it is likely to be similar to the last dive. Instead the check can focus on anything that is new as well as checking that all the existing kit is in place and working. In addition the buddy check will confirm the details of the dive plan to ensure that all members of the team have a common understanding of how the dive is going to progress.

There are many variations on the buddy check. TDI use the abbreviation START to cover the key points;

S - S-Drill (check air-sharing technique is clear and that regulator hoses are free to deploy, for an overhead environment check backup torches)

T - Team (confirm placement of kit, team positions and readiness to enter water)

A - Air (confirm turn pressures and contingency plans. Test each regulator)

R - Route (confirm entry and exit points and route for dive)

T - Tables (confirm maximum depth, dive schedule, depth of gas switches and contingency plans)

Buddy checks of this type don't have to be long drawn out or formal affairs. In fact they can appear to a casual observer as if the dive team is just having an informal conversation about their dive plan. Whether it is formal or informal a buddy check is still a worthwhile exercise no matter how experienced you are.