

# undercurrent

*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

March 2010

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## Rocio del Mar, Sea of Cortez, Mexico

*good liveaboard and fish life, with well-trained crew – and sea lions*

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### Editorial Office:

Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor  
3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

Dear Fellow Diver:

I'm in the middle of the Sea of Cortez, surrounded by scores of darting sea lions. Their underwater barks seem as loud as if I heard them on land. So I came with a surprise, a double-horn Dive Alert that I blew underwater. And guess what? I stopped them in their tracks. Every sea lion stopped barking, spun around and looked at me. If sea lions can look amazed, these did. I motioned to one curious guy by waving my hand toward me. "Come on over." He moved a little closer every time I beckoned so I kept it up. When he got right up next to me, I spun my finger and he twirled away as if we had rehearsed it. I turned around and my fellow divers were clapping.

A trip to the Sea of Cortez has its marvels, and the first of them is that a trip on this spanking new liveaboard, the 110-foot Rocio del Mar, begins by deplaning in Phoenix, Arizona. Following is a four-hour van ride to Puerto Penasco, but no matter where you go, there's always a van ride somewhere. By skipping a change of planes, I figured I'd come out ahead, and I did. I was so pleased after my July trip that I went again in October, arriving with nine others at 4 p.m. for a 6 p.m. sailing.

The Rocio del Mar, with room for 22 passengers, was built for diving. Owned by captain Lolo Sandoval and his wife Dora, a dive instructor, the craft took nearly three years to construct. The builders -- those who did the electrical, welding, engine installation, wood-working and fiberglass -- all became the crew! Rest assured, they can fix any problem because they built the boat. And now the



*Rocio del Mar*



entire crew is working to become divemasters. Jorge and Julio pilot the Zodiacs and stay on board during dives. Aurelio, the master carpenter, manages the dive platform. Dora joins nearly all the dives and Lolo is on many. Lea, another divemaster, lives in Rocky Point and owned a dive operation in the area. José Luis Robles from Puerto Vallarta was hired for the trip; he's a college professor and teaches diving.

After our first dinner aboard, each of us gave a brief diving bio. There were no newbies on board, usually the case with live-aboard diving. A hurricane had been crossing Baja, so there was a lot of chatter about whether it would affect our diving. After a good night's sleep, I awoke at 6 a.m. and took a cup of coffee to the top deck to watch the sun rise and illuminate the stark islands. The dying hurricane had passed well to the south and while the week's weather

began windy, it cleared and I never missed a dive.

After a light breakfast, the crew lifted the three Zodiacs -- two 19 feet long and a smaller one -- off the stern racks. You pick the Zodiac you want depending upon its dive site destination. I geared up and stowed my towel in a drawer under the seat. The main compressor was down but the small alternate took only a few extra minutes to handle the load and was fixed by the third dive, after Lolo used his satellite phone to call the company for tips.

The crew helped everyone gear up (tanks are 80 cu. ft. and filled at each diver's station), and I scuffled down four steps to the large dive platform. I was one of eight, four on each side. Divemaster Jorge coordinated our rolling backwards. The first dive was to 60 feet, no current, with visibility to 40 feet. I came across little piles of shells, which included cowries and murexes, and with more investigation, I found a large octopus, then another; both let me stroke their mantles. It was the typical Sea of Cortez fish life, from endless puffers to grunts and groupers. Visibility ran between 40 and 100 feet on all dives. On the surface, Jorge took all my gear so I could easily use the one-step ladder to get back on the Zodiac.

The next dive was deeper, and I drifted with the slight current along a wall. The water temperature began at 83 degrees, but as I descended through thermoclines to 100 feet, it plummeted to 63 degrees. Here, an incredible forest of yellow-blooming black coral covered much the bottom, serving as good camouflage for several eels and a substantial grouper. Nudibranchs and flat worms were everywhere -- it's like an Easter egg hunt to look for them. Lots of scorpionfish were nestled about while butterflyfish and angelfish hung around long enough for me to shoot them.

Dive times are set at 7 and 10:30 a.m., 1 and 4 p.m., plus a sunset or night dive. If the visibility or the wind was bad, Lolo moved the Rocio to a better spot and the Zodiacs followed. On one dive, the current meandered until I got between a couple of large rocks, then it increased to about two knots. Some divers surfaced to get out of it

## ***Rocio del Mar, Sea of Cortez***

Diving ( <i>experienced</i> )	★★★★★
Diving ( <i>beginners</i> )	★★★★
Accommodation	★★★★1/2
Food	★★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★★

★ = poor      ★★★★★ = excellent

*Caribbean Scale*

## Recalls of Mares Computers and Tusa Regulators

If you've got a Nemo Air dive computer, contact your dealer now. Mares issued a recall last summer for the slow-leaking O-rings on its Nemo Air computer's Quick Connector hose, but it turns out the replacement O-ring issued wasn't the solution. On February 1, Mares announced another recall for the hose. "We determined the replacement o-ring was not the best fix so we designed a whole new quick disconnect system to replace it," Mares' national sales manager Steve Lamphear told *Undercurrent*. "The computer itself works fine, it's only the Quick Connector that can leak through." Mares' Italian technicians redesigned the entire metal fitting at the end of the Quick Connector hose holding the o-ring; the new replacements have a groove machined around the middle of the fitting. All Nemo Air computers

need this replacement, so contact a Mares dealer to get the new Quick Connector hose replacement, free of charge. If you want Mares to do the replacement, call Customer Service at 800-874-3326 and give them your computer's serial number for shipping info.

Tusa is recalling its RS-670 regulators distributed and sold between May and September 2009 because loosening of the BLC plug on the first stage may cause a high-pressure leak. We contacted Tusa twice for more details, but no one returned our calls. If you've got an RS-670, check the serial number printed on the first stage. Affected units have serial numbers between 22 and 29, 31 and 103, 637 and 676, 708 and 716, and 737 and 776. Take your regulator back to the dealer, contact Tusa by e-mail at [info@tusa.com](mailto:info@tusa.com), or call 800-482-2282 to mail it back for a BLC plug replacement, covered under warranty.

but I decided to go for a wild ride, heading up when I got down to 700 psi. Within seconds after sounding my Dive Alert, a Zodiac was alongside.

On the second evening, anchored in a half-moon bay, the water was calm, the night spectacular. Underwater, the nightlife was happening. I saw more than 15 octopuses but few crab or lobster. Among all the active and diverse fish, standouts were a porcupine puffer looking like a perfect football, triggerfish and incredible parrotfish.

Then some fun. On some dives, I hid under my BC a shark on a stick that opens its mouth when I pull a trigger at the bottom. When an unsuspecting soul is taking a photo, I slip Lucy into the picture. No one has tried to drown me yet. From then on, Lucy became a diver and a center of attention for some photographers. So I signed her in and out of the dives.

Coffee, fruit, toast and bagels are ready at 6 a.m. Then first dive at 7 a.m., after which a full breakfast is served, cooked to order. The lunch is not heavy - club sandwiches or tacos and an incredible soup daily. Every meal had five different fruits and juices. A typical dinner was pork tenderloin with vegetables, and Chef Pancho swirled gravy around the food like the decorations at the Coyote Cafe. Beer or wine is \$2. If you want hard stuff, you have to bring it.

The galley is on the bottom deck and comfortably seats 24 people. Up the stairs to the next deck, you'll find eight cabins. Through a set of doors and you're in the dive area. Up another flight of stairs is the audio/video room with a flat-screen TV, CD and DVD players, and leather couches to watch movies or review the day's pictures. On this level is the wheelhouse and two more cabins, each with double beds and a single bunk on top to accommodate three people. All have a private bath with toilet, sink and shower, and each room has a large picture window to see the breathtaking scenery as the boat moves along.

Diving around the Midriff Islands is cold in places because the water is pushed from the depths by extreme tides that can go 22 feet up and down twice a day. This sometimes creates an intense current as the water is pushed up from the bottom and shifts from tide change to tide change. There are times when it changes during a dive, so a diver and the chase boats need to be ready to adjust the dive.

I wanted to see what the Sea of Cortez had that I wasn't seeing by myself, so I asked divemaster Guillermo to point things out. The critters that were hiding in plain sight amazed me, especially seahorses, flatworms, and nudibranch in all the hues of the rainbow. A hairy lobster resided in a hole the size of a silver dollar, which Ned DeLoach (he's the business partner of Fish ID guidebook author Paul Humann) tricked

to the top of the hole with little tufts of seaweed and a lot of patience so he could shoot it. On every dive is a divemaster who watches without interference.

At Bahia de Los Angeles, Dora and I took the Zodiac into a tiny fishing village to see if the fishermen had seen whale sharks. Bits of nets and flotsam held their colorful driftwood shacks together, and rope anchored them in case of wind. They had seen none for weeks, they said. We didn't see any either, but I learned that several trips later, divers swam with seven whale sharks. (Dora put together a couple of boxes of supplies and blankets to be sent back to the fishermen. I'm sure that will be a ritual every trip because Bahia de Los Angeles is one of the stops now.)

Thursday night was the outdoor BBQ on the top deck, which runs the length of the boat, interrupted by only the mast tower. (From here, we watched 20 sperm whales feed 100 feet away, a manta leap completely from the water, and minke and pilot whales and dolphins pirouetting and riding the bow wake.) Pancho set up picnic tables and grilled the dinner while we divers relaxed with drinks. During this night under the stars, the lights from the boat illuminated the water, attracting small fish, which in turn attracted hundreds of squid that broke the surface as they fed in the moonlight and starlight.

Of course, the trip ended too soon. We packed up Friday night and boarded the van at 11 a.m. Saturday, getting us to the Phoenix airport around 3 p.m. Sharing close quarters for a week with your fellow divers always leads to friendships and bonding, extending good memories for a long time after your wetsuit dries. This trip was no exception. Even the van ride back was fun.

-- A.W.



**Diver's Compass:** The price of a Saturday-to-Saturday trip is \$1,950, double occupancy, and there is a 10 percent Mexican tax for each diver . . . The round trip in the comfortable, air-conditioned van was \$100 . . . Nitrox not offered . . . Puerto Penasco, "Rocky Point" in English, sits east of Mexico's northernmost point and is an inexpensive, beautiful, little town, like an early Cozumel; a small commercial airport may be operating there later this year . . . You need a passport to get into Mexico, even by land. . . Website for Rocio del Mar (named for Dora's daughter, Rocio): [www.rociodelmarliveaboard.com](http://www.rociodelmarliveaboard.com)

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## Bonaire, Orlando, Mexico...

### *dive sites with wild conditions, big fish and Disney World tourists*

**An Orlando dive bargain at \$175.** It's the aquarium at Disney's Epcot Center, 203 feet in diameter, 25 feet deep and with eight-inch-thick Plexiglas windows for visitors to ogle you. In December, Dan Huthwaite (Great Falls, VA) called Epcot DiveQuest and booked a dive for the next day. All he needed was his mask. "Staff members had us sign release forms, checked C-cards, took our shoe and wetsuit sizes, and gave us a behind-the-scenes-tour. You suit up in a nice locker room, then a divemaster provides the briefing before 40 minutes of swimming in 200-foot visibility with sand tigers, huge turtles, rays, schooling tarpon, and on and on. Awesome. Those with family members on the other side of the glass can ham it up for them. The dive is open to divers 10 and up. Youngsters need a diving parent to accompany them. They do several dives each weekend. Hot showers and towels were available post dive." (Get Epcot DiveQuest details at <http://disneyworld.disney.go.com/tours-and-experiences>)

**Larry's Wildside Diving, Bonaire.** Bear Johnston (Madera, CA) arrived in November, only to find that Larry has moved on and new owners have teamed with Buddy Dive Resort to promote diving on the island's east side. "This is not a dive for beginners or anyone who might get seasick. The east side is very rough because of the trade winds. You board the boat in calm Lac Bay and suit up. I even put my mask on so I could see. Entering the ocean from the bay is an adventure and you need to hang on. There are a couple of moorings

but for most dives, the boat follows the divers. I saw at least six eagle rays, eight turtles and friendly tarpon. I did the basic backroll but getting back on was easy. They deflate a section of the hull to put a ladder in, and you climb aboard, tanks and all.” (www.larryswildsidediving.com)

#### **Stuart Cove’s Dive Bahamas, New Providence.**

There’s nothing worse than having an operator cut your dives short, and we hear a number of reports that Stuart Cove’s operation isn’t the place for an experienced diver to get much quality bottom time. Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (Guaynabo, PR) was there in October and reports: “On my previous trip six years ago, they were attentive to their clients and accommodating as to dive sites. I found now an assembly-line, cattle-car operation concerned only with funneling divers to the shark feed circus. Those of us who would rather make wall and reef dives to see the free-ranging sharks had to make do with the leftovers. We asked to be taken to a site named Ray of Hope and on three different days were told that they could not take us because there was a shark feed nearby, though we had been promised otherwise. The dive times were controlled, not by remaining air but by the time the boat had to be at the dock. Therefore, surface intervals were 30 minutes.”

David Bader (Norwood, NC) says, “I was one of the first picked up in the morning and had a one-hour bus trip to the dive shop. They ran two boats per day with 17 to 20 divers each. The crew and staff were friendly and professional but the dives were overly controlled. I returned to the boat on all dives with half a tank of air or more. First dives were either wall or wreck dives and had a maximum dive time of 35 minutes, including the mandatory safety stop of three minutes. I could have easily done an hour on all dives. I believe the reason for the short dive times is the lack of surface interval provided; the average interval was only 30 minutes. Any more would make the boats late for the afternoon dives. That’s not a good reason for me to cut short my dives.”

But the short bottom times don’t bother every diver. S. Singer (Panama City, Panama) is one. “The dive boats were comfortable, with space for everyone. Almost every trip had at least one student and instructor on board but they did not inconvenience anyone. First dive was always deeper, generally 70 feet, 100 feet if you and your buddy had a computer. These were generally a combination of the wall that surrounds New Providence and a wreck that was around 50 feet. Second dive was almost always a reef, between 25 and 35 feet. First dive was limited to about 35 minutes or 500 psi, second dive was limited to 45 minutes or 500 psi. These limits felt quite comfortable to me; I never felt rushed. Remember the main industry on the island is tourism so they will try and upsell you, although they’re nice about it.” (www.stuartcove.com)

**Dive St. Kitts.** Serious divers can’t always get away for four-tank-a-day diving; sometimes family vacations beckon. Henry and Carol Ziller (Conifer, CO) got wet with Dive St. Kitts in November and stayed at the Marriott Hotel and Casino in Frigate Bay. “This is a very large hotel that also has timeshare condos, several restaurants and bars. The swim-up bar has the best happy hour but the restaurants are expensive. A cab to less costly restaurants downtown costs \$12. The hotel has a nice beach, pools, spa, basketball court, tennis courts and

## **Do the Drugs You Take Increase Bends Risk?**

As we hope you know by now, dehydration can be a factor in getting a bends hit. That’s why one should drink plenty of water when diving. And why drinking alcohol in excess then diving on a hangover is an unwise practice. It’s also why any diver who takes a diuretic needs to be sure he’s drinking enough fluid to counteract the possible dehydration.

Diuretics, either alone (e.g., Lasix, Hydrodiuril) or in combination with another agent, are most commonly, and often among the first, drugs prescribed for the control of high blood pressure. Occasionally, they are prescribed to control vertigo.

Diuretics of all types tend to reduce plasma volume and increase blood viscosity, and the potential implication of this for DCS is obvious. Keep in mind, dehydration as a result of diuretics doesn’t occur overnight; it can take a period of some weeks.

Interestingly, in a study of medications divers receiving hyperbaric facility care had taken (“Drugs Downed Divers Did,” presented at the Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Society’s annual scientific meeting in June 2007), antihypertensives were the second most frequently reported.

-- Doc Vikingo

a golf course across the street. We had a one-bedroom, two-bath unit with a Jacuzzi tub, separate shower, fridge, but no microwave. We made reservations for diving with Dive St. Kitts via e-mail. We dropped a couple of third dives, mostly because they were taking some people out for “discover scuba” dives, which would be short and close in. Dive St. Kitts is at the Bird Rock Beach Hotel, about seven minutes from the Marriott with complimentary pickup. There is storage in the dive shop for all your gear. Diving is from a covered 35-foot boat with two 250hp outboard motors. Entry is back roll and a ladder for climbing back on. Most sites are 5 to 15 minutes away, including the signature *River Taw* wreck dive, with lots of fish. An octopus is hidden in the front bumper of the van located between the wreck’s two sections, and a large old turtle hangs out there too. Visibility was not too good. We did the dive one afternoon, then as our night dive with our granddaughter (her first). Green Point reef had lots of fish, but mostly small ones. Rays, one about four feet in diameter, spotted drums, lobsters and garden eels. (www.divestkitts.com)

**Revillagigedo Islands, Mexico.** You don’t have to travel all the way to Costa Rica or Ecuador for big fish. Two boats out of Cabo San Lucas take divers to the big guys. Colin Earl (Barnaby, BC) went out with the *Nautilus Explorer* in December. She’s a fine craft with a first-rate captain, Mike Lever. Earl tells us, “We had mantas, hammerheads and dolphins on just about all dives. There were plenty of occys, eels, lobsters, sting rays and other life to entertain and pose for photos. We also had plenty of white-tip, silver-tip and Galapagos sharks keeping us company. On two dives, others saw a whale shark but we missed it. We also had a tiger shark on one dive, and we were happy when it kept its distance.” (www.nautilusexplorer.com)

The *Solmar V* also plies these waters. Longtime subscriber Don Acheson (Silver Spring, MD) was aboard last April and saw all the big guys, too. “With 22 divers and crew, the *Solmar V* is a bit crowded. In the lounge, four tables seat 16, and the remaining six divers seat themselves on eight bar stools around four tiny tables. The cabins come with a small toilet, shower and up/down bunks, except for the most forward cabin, which had bunks on either side of the hull. On paper, it seems more spacious than the others but the hull seriously intruded; getting in and out of my bunk was a stretch for this old man. Meals were very good.” But Acheson voices a real concern: “The *Solmar V* practices whale-chasing with its pangas. While it must be exciting to see a whale underwater, I worry about the potential for injury to a whale, diver or snorkeler. Propellers are the obvious risk to the whale. To humans in the water with them, they’re huge animals, albeit without a reputation for violence, but accidents can happen. On one chase, which I observed from the deck, an adult whale elevated its tail and slapped the water’s surface vigorously a few times – perhaps in warning, perhaps not. In any case, (*Continued on page 8*)

## Four Factors That Reduce Your Risk of DCS

Peter B. Bennett, founder of Divers Alert Network and now executive director of the Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Society, gave a seminar at his organization’s annual meeting last fall titled “Safer Ascent Concepts for the Recreational Diver.” He talked about the four factors that could help divers make safer ascents and therefore avoid decompression sickness (DCS). Here’s a synopsis of his presentation.

DCS risk may be affected by the depth of the dive, dehydration, obesity, age, water temperature, degree of exertion, etc. But exercise, water temperature, Nitrox and safety stops may help to make ascents safer.

Exercise 24 hours or even two hours before a dive has been shown to significantly reduce vascular bubbles post-

dive. However, exercise during a dive leads to increased risk of DCS, while exercise during ascent appears to decrease risk. But exercise after the dive increases the risk of DCS.

If a diver is warm during the dive and then becomes cold during ascent, DCS risk increases. But if the diver is cold during the dive and warm on ascent, the risk is lower.

For safer ascents, the diver should dive nitrox but ascend using an air table.

A shallow safety stop at about 15 feet for three to five minutes significantly decreases vascular bubbles and is now widely used by divers. Recent research has also shown a deep safety stop for two-and-a-half minutes at half the absolute depth can also significantly reduce vascular bubbles post-dive at 82 feet. Whether this also will be the same for all recreational divers at all depths, however, remains to be established, as does whether this will reduce DCS.

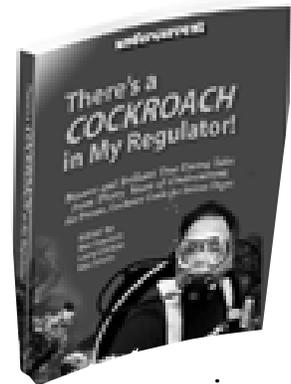
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a snorkeler underneath that tail most likely would have been seriously injured, and there were many snorkelers in the water near those whales at that time.” (www.solmarv.com)

Revillagigedo liveaboards must change their itineraries for the time being, thanks to the Mexican Navy. When Reuben Watkins (Pikeville, TN) came aboard the *Nautilus Explorer* in January, crew announced they had just been alerted that the navy was running “special operations” until March 21, and dive boats were restricted from Socorro Island. The boat now spends more time at its other two stops, San Benedicto and Roca Partida. Captain Mike Lever told *Undercurrent* this is a first in six years’ diving at Sorrocco, and all dive boats must check in at that island’s navy base. “The downside is that guests miss out on the night snorkel with silky sharks, but overall we have the same number of dives – we don’t lose the morning stop at the navy base.”

-- Ben Davison

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## New Dangers of Rebreather Diving

*read this before you buy or upgrade rebreather gear*

A closed-circuit rebreather might not be something you’re keen to use or to spend money on. It costs thousands of dollars, and then there’s the unit-specific training you’ll need to be certified. The total cost doesn’t encourage anyone to change from one make to another, especially if you need to pay for another training course. However, people do and there is no doubt that the market segment has matured. Surprisingly, there must now be nearly 10,000 individual rebreather units in circulation.

With ordinary open-circuit scuba, you inhale gas from your tank and exhale it out into the water, wasting most of it. With a rebreather, you recycle your gas, replenishing the small amount of oxygen you have actually used, and remove the poisonous carbon dioxide, the waste product of metabolism, chemically. The people who devote so much money to buying the gear and diving closed-circuit naturally tend to be very keen divers, and a large number of them use their rebreathers to do dives that are deeper and for longer than would normally be practical on good old-fashioned open-circuit scuba. That’s because gas usage is very low and decompression requirements are drastically reduced. For example, a no-stop time for a dive on a rebreather to 60 feet approaches three hours, whereas the no-stop time on simple open-circuit scuba would be around 50 minutes.

Rebreather divers breathe the gas in a continuous loop. The problem arises only in that your unit must supply you with enough oxygen in the loop to sustain life but not so much that it poisons you, and the carbon dioxide exhaled must be removed. Carbon dioxide is both tasteless and odorless. By the time carbon dioxide has built up to disastrous levels, it is often too late, resulting in mental confusion and the inability to self-rescue. Low levels of oxygen are as effective a killer as a bullet in the brain – there has been at least one recorded case of a rebreather diver suffering shallow-water-blackout at a depth of 240 feet. Alas, because of the nature of these fatal accidents, coroners usually put the cause of death as either drowning or heart attack, which tells us little.

With open-circuit scuba, you either have gas to breathe or you don’t. It’s that simple. The rebreather diver can always breathe but he must know exactly what he is breathing. He relies on onboard analysis of the oxygen content, perfect carbon dioxide scrubber design and self-maintenance to keep the insidious perils of carbon dioxide at bay. Strangely enough, he needs more oxygen as he gets shallower, so he is more at risk on the way up than on the way down. Many of the fatalities have happened in relatively shallow water.

Of course, the training provided by agencies like TDI and IANTD cover all these subjects, and the manufacturers work closely with the training agencies to ensure no units supplied by them fall into the hands of untrained divers. Rebreather trainers do the same with used units they might trade. However, it cannot be denied that there have been an unacceptable number of fatalities of experienced divers when using this equipment despite these precautions. The use of a rebreather statistically appears to increase the risk in the hobby of scuba diving.

New improved versions of rebreathers are arriving on the market every day and people naturally want to upgrade. The problem arises when they try to recover some of the cost of their previous unit. There is now a vibrant second-hand market of rebreather gear developing, and although there have always been a small number of self-taught rebreather divers, there's also the specter of a greater number of new rebreather divers venturing into the water breathing from units that they only think they know how to use. It is only natural that people trying to claw back several thousand dollars they spent on their old units will mostly be concerned that the buyer's payment is good and not that the buyer is a good rebreather-user prospect.

A few would argue that some of the official training delivered is not as good as the training agencies intended it to be. This may be true and it reflects the individual instructor. It also reflects the willingness of the trainee to grasp new ideas and ask pertinent questions. It's a two-way deal. Training doesn't work by osmosis.

There are also a few who would argue that being self-taught is the better way to approach rebreather use. Some would say the initial training is only the start of the learning curve. I'd agree with that. Closed-circuit rebreathers are unforgiving in their use. You rarely get second chances. Some very competent divers, much more competent than you, have learned that lesson the hard way and paid the ultimate price.

The additional hazards of rebreather diving are insidious. If you know anyone who is about to or has already purchased a rebreather through unofficial channels, as they might when buying a second-hand unit, please implore them to seek out the appropriate training by an instructor before using it unaided. The same goes for you. You owe it to your family, dependents, spouse, and yourself. Get the proper closed-circuit rebreather training.

*John Bantin is the technical editor of DIVER magazine in the United Kingdom. For 20 years, he has used and received virtually every piece of equipment available in the U.K. and the U.S., and makes around 300 dives per year for that purpose. He is also a professional underwater photographer.*

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## Where's Your Customer Service, Scubapro?

*a reader's detailed 30-minute video is met with silence*

*Undercurrent* reader Richard Welk (Moodus, CT) had problems with his new Scubapro BCD. Having used Scubapro gear nearly exclusively for 30 years, he made a 36-minute video last summer, with his wife holding the camera and him comparing his trusty Scubapro STAB jacket to his new Classic Plus. "There's no sleight of hand, we're not lawyers or tricksters," Welk said on camera while standing in front of his garage, surrounded by his dive gear. "We're just trying to show the problem with my new BC."

Welk, a big man, bought a new Classic Plus in XL, the same size as his old STAB jacket. He went through two that didn't fit right, then his dive shop owner put him in an XL Classic Plus. Again no dice, and BCs in size large were too small. Welk believes Scubapro has shortened the backpack and lowered it too far down on the bladder. He measured the difference from the top of the backpack to the top of the BC for each. It's 3.5 inches for the STAB jacket, and eight inches for the Classic Plus, a difference of 4.5 inches. This was all in his video, which he sent to both Scubapro and its parent company, Johnson International, in August. He might as well have tossed it in the trash can. He got no response from either party.

So in November, Welk e-mailed Scubapro and got a response from Jules Ganier in technical services. He had never heard of the video Welk made, so he asked Welk to send photos. After review, Ganier made suggestions to Welk as to how he might use the BC, which Welk said didn't help. And it didn't address his issues with sizing.

In an e-mail, Ganier asked, "What do you think the proper resolution for this issue would be?" Welk replied, "I am convinced my new BC is an XXL, and any tweaking would just be compensating for the wrong size. All I want is a BC in this style that fits me properly." Welk didn't hear back from anyone afterwards.

In January, we e-mailed Ganier to find out whether Welk had a bead on a problem. The same day, we got a call from Scubapro's general manager, Mario Valenzuela, and product manager Brad Lally. They said our e-mail was the first they had heard about Welk, his problem or his video. "We changed the style in this particular jacket in 2000, and this is the first time we've encountered this kind of problem," Valenzuela said. "He should have contacted us here to begin with instead of Johnson Outdoors. It's a big company so God knows where the video ended up."

Easier said than done. In the "Contact Us" section of Scubapro-Uwatec's website, it says most questions are answered in its FAQ section, or by contacting your local dealer. Otherwise, you can only e-mail Scubapro via its website. Scubapro-Uwatec lists addresses for its global offices but no telephone numbers or names for executives or department managers. Members of the press also have to fill out the online e-mail form (we found it funny that on Scubapro-Uwatec's website for British users, the "Press" page only consists of filler text in Latin).

Scubapro is not the only gear maker that plays hard-to-get with its customers. Mares has no contact info on its website, and you have to dig deep into the website of its owner, sporting-goods maker Head, to find contact info for corporate headquarters in Norwalk, CT. Tusa, owned by Japanese company Tabata, only has a "Contact Us" e-mail

## Asia-Pacific Divers Feeling More Jellyfish Stings

It's that time of year again in Queensland, Australia, when deadly irukandji and box jellyfish move into its waters and get the beaches cordoned off for six months. This season, 50 people so far have been hospitalized after being stung along Queensland's far north and central coasts. One was Ben Southall, the lucky guy who won last year's "The Best Job in the World" contest to be caretaker of Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays – he was stung on the elbow while jet-skiing.

This year, even divers wearing wetsuits haven't been spared. In December, a 28-year-old Englishman wearing a full-body stinger suit was unlucky enough to dive face first into a jellyfish off South Molle Island. In late January, a 43-year-old Londoner aboard the *Pacific Star* was doing an afternoon dive near Hayman Island when he was stung on the face and neck.

We e-mailed four dive shops in Cairns and Port Douglas, plus the Queensland Dive Tourism Association, to ask if they've had bad jellyfish run-ins or are planning for any. None responded to us. One of our Indian Ocean correspondents followed up, calling two Cairns dive operators, who said it was a non-issue.

Not so fast, say Peter Fenner, a professor at James Cook University, and John Lippmann, executive director of Divers Alert Network Asia-Pacific, who state that the jellyfish are becoming a problem in other Asia-Pacific countries. They wrote an article in the September 2009 issue of *Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine* noting an increase of severe Irukandji-like stings in Thailand waters, and detailed two serious cases.

In December 2007, a 35-year-old dive instructor was diving off Koh Tao, hanging his left arm over the mooring line

at the safety stop to support his camera. Back on the boat, he pulled down his wetsuit and felt a stinging sensation like a cigarette burn on his inner left arm. Within minutes, the pain had moved up his arm, across his back and into his legs. He had severe chest pain, difficulty breathing and an irregular heartbeat. He recovered in the hospital but even a year later, he still experienced leg pain and chest discomfort.

A month later, a 40-year-old British diver wearing a sleeveless wetsuit without a hood was diving near Pattaya. Climbing the ascent line, he felt a sharp pain on the back of his head. Reaching back, he felt a tentacle, which became caught in the current and wrapped around both his arms, causing intense pain. He surfaced, and crew poured vinegar over the wound and removed tentacle traces, but he began vomiting, and suffered severe abdominal cramps and chest tightness. Spiral marks, surrounded by skin lesions, were left on his arms and scalp. After 18 hours in the hospital, he returned to his hotel room but four hours later, the stomach cramps returned and he vomited blood. He returned to the hospital, was discharged the next day and made a slow recovery over several weeks.

This is the reason for wearing skins and a hood in these waters, no matter how warm they are. Also, slather on SafeSea before every dive. Multiple tests have shown the lotion protects against many types of jellyfish and fire coral stings ([www.buysafesea.com](http://www.buysafesea.com)).

While Queensland's dive industry may not reply to our questions about jellyfish, the situation is worse elsewhere, Fenner and Lippmann write. "News of fatalities and severe stings appears sometimes to be suppressed by tourism operators in more underdeveloped countries, concerned about the impact on their businesses and local economy. Also, unlike Australia's comprehensive world news coverage, any reports of fatal jellyfish stings are far less likely to be publicized, unless the fatality involves an overseas tourist."

form on its website. Oceanic and Aqua Lung are better – both list their U.S. addresses and phone numbers. You can call and have a live operator transfer you to the right person; Oceanic’s phone directory sends you straight to sales, customer service or technical support. What’s so hard about listing a phone number, Scubapro? You’re based in California; divers with concerns won’t mind paying for a long-distance call.

After speaking with us, Scubapro offered a full refund on the Classic Plus but Welk turned it down. “I would much rather Scubapro get me a BC that fits like my old Scubapro BC, as I do not want to go to another company.” Lally e-mailed Welk offering their new Classic Unlimited, which they thought might resolve the problem. He offered to ship it FedEx and take back the Classic Plus. If Welk’s not satisfied with that fit, Scubapro will refund the cost of the ClassicPlus.

Welk accepted the offer, but he’s still miffed that no one looked at his video or sent him any acknowledgment, and that he had to keep calling and calling. “I’ve been a customer for 30 years. You can’t turn your back on the people who made your company. I’ve been unemployed for a year and I’m still buying their gear. Even if they sent me a letter saying I was full of shit, at least they would have acknowledged me.” Still, he says, “More than anything else, I want to remain with Scubapro.”

Welk went above and beyond what other dissatisfied customers would do, and he has a point: If a devoted guy like him can’t get through, who can?

-- Vanessa Richardson

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## Our Deteriorating Coral Reefs

### *one reason why divers are hanging up their fins*

Why are there fewer divers in the water?

For years, the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) and other dive industry groups have lamented that the sport is not growing in the U.S. Many reasons get bandied about but one is never touched: the degradation of the reefs close to home, especially in the Atlantic and Caribbean. So in December, we sent out our monthly e-mail, asking subscribers if they’ve seen a decline in reef quality and fish life, and whether that has changed their travel plans.

Most seasoned subscribers agree the sad deterioration of the reefs has thwarted dive plans, and trips to so-so reefs don’t excite them anymore. When Ron Harvey (Peabody, MA) first dived the Bahamas in 1986, he was amazed at the quality and quantity of fish life and reefs. “However, the older pros kept saying to me, ‘You should have seen this place 20 years ago.’ I just returned from a trip to Freeport. On the boat were several newer divers commenting on the reef and fish life. I had to cover my mouth to keep from saying ‘You should have seen this place 20 years ago.’ If something is not done, I might be hanging up my fins because it will not be worth paying to visit a dead reef with no fish.”

“Caribbean diving has become boring,” says Larry Polster (Martinsville, IN). “Cozumel, Belize, Roatan, the Caymans and the Virgin Islands, they’re all about the same. The only reason I still travel to the Caribbean once a year is cost and less travel time.”

“The decline in reef life has discouraged my family from diving as much as we’d like,” says Rick Tavan (Saratoga, CA). “We went to Pirates Point on Little Cayman almost every year for six years. Even in that short time, the decline has been significant. Some of this is hurricane damage in the shallows but even well down on the wall, the corals are darker, dimmer and dying, and the number of fish seems to decline each visit. We also used to go ‘somewhere new’ every year but have no pending plans. Some of this is real life intruding on dive life but the latter is just not as exciting as it used to be.”

“I’ve been shooting video of the Cayman reefs every year since 1994,” says Joseph Springer (Southampton, NJ). “I once described the reef as lush. My daughter posed over huge barrel sponges. We had to push the queen triggers out of the way. Nurse sharks dozed in the reef. That and much more are missing. For the first time in a long time, I’m not visiting Grand Cayman. Let the Caymans have their cruise ships and jet skis.”

***“I think there is little hope for the oceans. I wonder if recreational diving will still exist in 50 years. Our voice is feeble. We are too few.”***

We divers and snorkelers are the only people to see a reef firsthand. If you’ve been at it for a decade or more, what you’re witnessing is human-spawned destruction – pollution caused by agriculture and construction runoff, partially treated or untreated sewage, overfishing and warming seas.

Consider this sad but not untypical story from Kent Roorda (Denver, CO). “In the early 90’s, one of my favorite places to dive was the island of Guanaja in Honduras. Fish life was bountiful, reefs were beautiful and part of the price of my stay included \$20, which went toward preservation of the area’s reefs. Sadly, on my last stay there, I noticed a significant decline in marine life and a significant increase of junk in the water, like sewage and toilet paper. The locals, whose only outside income came from the diving industry, were putting all their trash into the water that was sustaining them. I also learned Red Lobster Restaurants had been (and is still) significantly fishing out the waters.”

Ron Ellermaier (Glenvil, NE) has degrees in biology and oceanography, and has dived the Caribbean for two decades. He notices that while reefs are still hanging on, they’re fighting a losing battle with pollutants. “The reefs below the mooring field at Peter Island in the British Virgin Islands are at least 60 percent alive, yet I saw no other living reefs in a week of diving the islands. BVI charter boats have no holding tanks so they pump all waste overboard. Last year, when ordering unspecified fish in Caribbean restaurants, I’ve been served Louisiana farm-raised catfish. Does that tell you something about the health of the Caribbean Sea?”

Destruction is happening even in conservation-focused places like Bonaire. Greg Oppenhuizen (Holland, MI) was surprised last February to see numerous fish with parasitic-looking spots on their bodies and brown-spotted morays lying dead on the beach. “I was told Bonaire is experiencing some wastewater treatment problems. I have another trip there this year, and it will influence future decisions. My attitude is ‘go now, this is as good as it gets,’ even though each year appears to be a little bit less.”

And anyone who has been to the Bahamas or many other islands are aghast at the algae covering endless acres of dead coral.

### **Divers are Going Farther Afield**

Instead of making two annual Caribbean trips to boring reefs, many readers would rather travel a greater distance to more pristine ones, even if it means just one dive trip a year. Though she’ll dive again after she finds another job, Jamie Pollack (New York, NY) says, “I would save my money to go to farther places like the Maldives or Fiji.”

“Once you see what diving’s like in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, it’s hard to go back to the Caribbean, even at its best,” says Lee Thé (Palo Alto, CA). “That does mean at least 21 hours of travel to get there, which is a pain in the butt.”

But even these remote, pristine areas are seeing increased problems – they’re catching up to the Caribbean’s level of increased dive boat traffic and a decline in fish and coral health.

Bill Sustr (Prospect Heights, IL) went last fall to Malapasucua Island in the Philippines to see thresher sharks. “Even at Monad Shoal, your chances of seeing a thresher are about 50-50 at best and only if you’re on one of the first boats. It looks like Palancar, with 12 boats hooked onto the moorings and bubbles everywhere. The coral has been kicked to smithereens. Anything that swims and is big enough to eat is long gone. A couple

## Join The Hunt For Lionfish

There is one new push by Caribbean dive operators that we heartily endorse: lionfish hunting. Many dive outfits are enlisting their customers to help them track down the non-native reef destroyers.

Lionfish, accidentally dumped into Miami's waters back in 1992, are now abundant along the southeastern Atlantic coast, Bahamas and Caymans. Salomon Singer (Panama City, Panama) went diving in January with Stuart's Cove Dive Bahamas and told us, "I don't recall seeing less than three on each dive and on at least one dive, I saw well over ten." Two other readers tell us they saw them during January dives in Curacao. The distance between Miami and Curacao is 1,190 miles, so lionfish have traveled an average of 66 miles every year southward – and there's no stopping them. While lionfish "wranglers" may keep them out of marine parks, the majority of islands' coastlines are not dived so there's no way to round up all lionfish.

Still, you can join up with dive operators that are sponsoring dive trips to nab the critters. Through June 15, Blue Magic Scuba in Cozumel is sponsoring a lionfish tournament and awarding prizes for accomplishments like the most killed and the largest. You spot the lionfish, the divemaster catches it. The more lionfish caught, the more chances you have to win prizes like free diving, hotel accommodations and gear. ([www.bluemagicscuba.com](http://www.bluemagicscuba.com)).

DiveTech on Grand Cayman is running a boat trip every Saturday afternoon through the end of March. Divers work in teams of two, using plastic nets, gloves and sticks to capture the fish. DiveTech has caught 250 lionfish since it started the hunts last year. The two-tank boat trip costs US\$24; call 888-946-5656 or e-mail [divetech@candwky.com](mailto:divetech@candwky.com) for details.

On Bonaire, 74 lionfish have been captured so far, and many females were carrying eggs, a bad sign. Captain Don's Habitat will host its first "Lionfish Wrangler Week" on March 6-13, letting divers earn money every time they spot a lionfish that is later captured by a marine park official during that week. ([www.habitatbonaire.com](http://www.habitatbonaire.com))

Even if you don't go on an official hunt, you can still help authorities track them down. Officials on islands like Bonaire and St. Croix are asking divers to take colored plastic ribbons to mark the fishes' location during dives. Or just take photos of the fish on your dives and tell the dive resort or shop where you saw them. To help the islands' lionfish wranglers avoid the venomous spines, you can buy them lionfish-collecting gear, sold by the nonprofit REEF for a pricey \$138 (at [www.reef.org](http://www.reef.org), click on "Store" and then "Field Supplies"), and donate them on your next dive trip.

REEF and island officials request that only wranglers they trained capture the lionfish. So don't grab one, and certainly don't club it to death. If it happens to be a female, you risk it releasing hundreds of eggs, which will –without natural predators – grow up to become more of a problem.

of muck dives on a dive trip are ok, but we gotta see something that swims. It's getting harder to find a place to go besides Wolf and Darwin or Cocos Island."

"I have shifted much of my diving to Raja Ampat, PNG, Maldives, but I think the giant fishing fleets are busy sweeping up every living thing even in these remote places," Chuck Wilson (Lincoln, NE) says. "I'm still enjoying the diving but I fear my grandkids might never have the opportunity to enjoy the magic of diving on pristine coral reefs with clouds of fish and fascinating critters."

Newer divers among our readers aren't voicing the same concerns because they haven't seen how badly the reefs have declined. This is their starting point. But new certifications have been declining for several years.

"If I had just started diving recently, I would not be impressed with the diving experience," says Ron Ellermaier. "What I would see would in no way look like the pictures in dive magazines that are still showing archival photos of reefs as they once looked."

Getting into diving requires enthusiastic divers talking it up, and that doesn't seem to be happening anywhere near as much. Our readers who try to get young people interested aren't reporting much luck. Of course it's an expensive sport but if they realize they have to travel to Asia or the Galapagos for pristine diving, it's no reason they decide to spend their money elsewhere.

"Some divers I know got angry about ads for Belize's Ambergris Key or Grand Cayman showing lovely reefs," says Mary Wicksten (Bryan, TX). "The places they went were silty or hurricane-damaged, with the nice reefs being far away and available only on costly charters. Some people have unrealistic ideas of what they will see underwater based on fabulous National Geographic-type videos."

## What Is the Industry Doing About This?

The industry is seeing this decline and addressing it – but not in the best way for diving’s long-term future. DEMA has a new “Be a Diver” campaign, trying to attract affluent people ages 38 to 53 who haven’t dived recently or ever, with logos and color photos of dive wrecks and reefs. But when it comes to speaking out about overfishing, shark-finning, creating marine parks, etc., the industry has never had much to say. Sure, PADI has its “Oceans Aware” project, but that’s about it for an environmental push from the industry. Without offering leadership showing divers how they can help tackle these problems, it really isn’t speaking out for their best interests.

Instead, to keep divers and snorkelers coming, dive organizations are up to all sorts of tricks. One is to artificially sink sanitized ships so people can go wreck diving. Of course, these aren’t real “wrecks” that went down because of torpedoes or a storm, but ships sunk so divers can have something to do. Then they’re creating underwater art museums. In Cancun, there’s the Underwater Sculpture Museum. Grenada has the Underwater Sculpture Park. And as we reported last month, Grand Cayman officials approved the construction of a floating bar at Stingray City so snorkelers can imbibe while they are harassing sting rays.

Unfortunately, some resorts still push day trips showing ocean conservation at its worst. On his last trip to trashed-up Guanaja, Kent Roorda got the opportunity to dive where groupers spawn. “We did find them spawning but for every grouper in the water, there was also a fisherman on the surface attempting to catch it. They were slaughtering the groupers who were trying to proliferate and multiply their species. While the resort represented the event as ‘fantastic,’ everyone else on the boat found it disgusting and in conflict with the locals’ representations that they were trying to save their waters.”

I remember when Fred Good, who owned St. George’s Reef on Belize, took me to a grouper spawn two decades ago. He never spoke about it publicly so fishermen wouldn’t discover the site.

## New Diver-Tracking Rules in the Red Sea, But Will Divers Abide?

After a recent spate of boats losing divers in their part of the Red Sea, Egyptian officials want to put a lid on it. In late January, the Minister of Tourism issued a decree that all dive boats in the remote and current-exposed southern dive sites of the Egyptian Red Sea must carry an approved diver-tracking system by no later than July 1. To date, only the Seasafe tracking system has met Egypt’s approval process; two other systems are still being tested.

Seasafe, made in New Zealand, is a small, box-like tracking unit that a diver wears on his arm or BC. If he goes astray, he pushes a button on the unit to alert all boats in the area with the Seasafe system. The alert triggers steps to coordinate a search, using a directional antenna to pinpoint the missing diver. Emperor Divers in the Red Sea installed Seasafe last fall and says the system tests accurately up to 11 miles away. Seasafe charges \$1,100 for the boat’s receiver and \$300 for each transmitter unit.

Satellite-signal devices are catching on with liveaboards elsewhere. Aggressor Fleet president Wayne Hasson tells us the *Okeanos Aggressor* in the Galapagos now uses Globalstar’s SPOT Satellite Tracker. It’s similar to Seasafe, with GPS transmitters working on 406 megahertz that,

with a push of a button, sends a signal to the satellite, which in turn alerts authorities to call the boat and alert it to the diver’s whereabouts.

These aren’t perfect yet, Hasson says. “There’s no directional finder, so there’s no way for them to call us and say, ‘Here’s the exact location.’ And if it’s very cloudy that day, you may not get a satellite signal. Still, we’ve found plenty of lost divers who were wearing these devices. The hardest time we had was last year when we were looking for a guy in the water, but he had actually climbed up on some rocks.”

The biggest obstacles for diver-tracking systems, says Hasson, are the divers. “Most people don’t like them because they’re cumbersome. They’re not waterproof so we need to put them in cases, making them bulky to carry. We strap them on people and say they’re highly recommended but we can’t make them mandatory and tell people they can’t dive without them. You can’t force somebody, or take away their diving privileges.”

True, but diving with a bulky little box on your BC is a small price to pay to avoid the lost-at-sea-at-night scenario without the tool that could rescue you a whole lot quicker.

## We Need to Strengthen Our Voice

There are a few small groups taking a stand. The Coral Reef Alliance, whose membership is almost entirely divers, got some dive shops in Hawaii to stop selling fish food that can disrupt marine life's feeding patterns. But in Hawaii, guys taking reef fish, especially the herbivorous algae eaters, for the aquarium trade are doing much more destruction.

Another small victory is in Florida, thanks to the ban on spearfishing the Goliath grouper. "Last summer, I took a dive trip to Palm Beach and was shocked at the number of Goliath groupers," says Deb Castellana (Point Richmond, CA). "In all my years of diving there, I had only seen one, and now they were present on many dives. However, I was astounded at how much less life was on the reef."

Plenty of divers want to help. "I'm trying to be as involved as I can in anything to do with saving the oceans," says Castellana. "From carrying around the Monterey Bay Aquarium's 'Seafood Watch' sustainable seafood guide when I shop to signing petitions against shark-finning, I do what I can."

The dive industry is small but it can have a strong voice. It should take an example from non-profits like Jean Michel Cousteau's Ocean Futures ([www.oceanfutures.org](http://www.oceanfutures.org)), Oceana ([www.oceana.org](http://www.oceana.org)), the Ocean Conservancy ([www.oceanconservancy.org](http://www.oceanconservancy.org)) and the Cousteau Society ([www.cousteausociety.org](http://www.cousteausociety.org))

that get funding from individuals, corporations, even the United Nations, to push ocean protection. Then there's Greenpeace ([www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org)), with its tough-as-nails stance, and Sea Shepherd ([www.seashepherd.org](http://www.seashepherd.org)), the toughest of all.

Why can't the dive industry, which gets more people into the waters daily than anyone else, take on a leadership role as significant as these non-for-profit organizations? They need to stand up for marine parks that prohibit taking anything – food fish, aquarium fish, etc. They need to speak out against coastal development projects on island nations, they need to engage where there is no voice for the ocean.

Because as our dive destinations decline, we'll be seeing fewer people taking up the sport and more seasoned divers with the same outlook as reader Ralph Bishop (Ithaca, NY). "Sadly, I think there is little hope for the oceans. I wonder if in another 50 years, recreational scuba diving will still exist. Our voice is feeble. We are too few. However, I would still encourage those who care to join the Cousteau Society, Oceana and any other organization that strikes a blow, however small, for our cause."

Divers want living and active reefs. The dive industry – DEMA, training agencies, dive shops, resorts and liveboards, equipment manufacturers – which survives because of these divers, must take a stand and demand protection for reefs and marine life before scuba diving anywhere becomes pointless.

## Abalone Diver Dies "Doing Something He Loved"

In November, Brian Dinday appeared on San Francisco's National Public Radio station to describe why he loved to dive for abalone in Sonoma County, despite the danger. "I'm a desk-bound lawyer and at 61, my wife thinks I am too old for abalone diving. She thinks it's dangerous - - and it is. Forget *Jaws*. The kelp can tangle and drown you. You have to scale cliffs with 50 pounds of equipment. Ab diving is a hold-your-breath sport, so you can miscalculate when you ascend." Two weeks later, Dinday drowned off of Horseshoe Cove in Salt Point State Park during an abalone dive with his 30-year-old son, Matthew. It was the day after Dinday had celebrated his 62nd birthday.

Matthew says the two were heading back to shore around noon when the waves came out of nowhere. Matthew reached the rocks first, realized Dinday was not behind him, and went back in. He found his father floating face-down but wasn't able to pull him in. A sheriff's helicopter arrived at 1 p.m. with a 100-foot rescue line to strap around the unconscious Dinday, now washed up on some rocks. He was airlifted to the top of a nearby bluff and pronounced dead.

After a hiatus of 20 years, Dinday took up abalone diving a few years ago and went with Matthew six times a year. The marine forecast had predicted big swells for that weekend but Dinday's wife, Mary, told the *Marin Independent Journal* that he always took safety precautions and knew the risks. "If there is any way to be consoled by this, at least he was doing something he loved."

- - Ben Davison



**The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers**

3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
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**Letters to the Editor/  
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**Undercurrent**  
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or write:

**Undercurrent**  
3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102  
Sausalito, CA 94965

**Editorial Office**  
Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor  
Vanessa Richardson, Senior Editor  
E-mail:  
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

[www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org)

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## Flotsam & Jetsam

**Dive Weights as Projectiles?** When it comes to dive gear, don't mess with the TSA in Atlanta. Returning from a St. Maarten dive trip in December, reader John Dechant (Syracuse, IN) had his dive weights taken out of his carryon and scanned as usual, but this time they were confiscated. "They said they could be projectiles. The supervisor said if they had been in my checked luggage, it would be okay. I said I had weights in my carryon for four years with no problem in several different airports. The reply: 'We do things right in Atlanta.'" That wasn't enough for Dechant, who wanted to know why Atlanta was so different. Don't follow his example. "My unwillingness to accept their ruling got me a discussion with the Atlanta police."

**Sinking and Exploding Liveboards.** Red Sea boats have had bad luck lately. In November, the *Coral Princess* capsized and sank near Egyptian dive site Ras Mohamed. A Spanish couple went missing and are presumed dead. A month later, the *Emperor Fraser* went aground and sank near Sharm el-Sheikh when stern mooring lines broke free. The captain didn't start the engines because divers were still in the water. Everyone was

picked up safely. On January 30, the *Typhoon*, *VIP One*, *Hyatt* and *Sweet Dream* were damaged by fire in a Suez dry dock; the cause may have been faulty dock electrical wiring. And in Fiji the next day, an explosion on the *Nai'a* left one workman dead and two injured (no crew or passengers were aboard). Painters were coating a water tank beneath passenger decks when the explosion happened. The hull and engine escaped damage but passenger cabins need to be gutted and rebuilt, which will take two to three months. Meanwhile, Blue Lagoon Cruises' *M/V Lycianda* has been chartered to take divers booked on *Nai'a*, with the same crew and itineraries.

**Think Twice About Fish Oil.** Omega-3 fatty acids are good for our hearts, but our reliance on them is not great for fish life, says author Paul Greenberg. In a *New York Times* op-ed, he says menhaden, an algae-eating herring rich in Omega-3 and the basis of the Atlantic Coast's marine food chain, is drastically overfished. Omega Protein in Houston catches 90 percent of them and while 13 Atlantic states have banned its boats, it still fishes in North Carolina, Virginia and federal waters (no menhaden protection bill yet). Greenberg recommends buying fish oil pills made from fish discards, or just use flax oil for the same heart benefits.