National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	NOAA Administrative Order 209-123	
NOAA ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER SERIES	DATE OF ISSUANCE	EFFECTIVE DATE 22 September 2011
SUBJECT NOAA DIVING PROGRAM		

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

.01 This Order establishes requirements, policies, responsibilities, and authorities for the development, implementation, and oversight of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Diving Program (NDP).

.02 The purpose of this order is to ensure all NOAA diving operations are conducted in a manner that will maximize protection of divers from accidental injury and/or illness.

SECTION 2. SCOPE.

.01 This Order applies to all NOAA employees engaged in diving activities during official duty hours (i.e., when receiving financial compensation for work performed) and Non-NOAA personnel performing dives under the direct supervision of a NOAA Divemaster or Lead Diver, where compressed gas is breathed in a hyperbaric environment.

.02 This order also applies to all diving activities conducted by NOAA divers and reciprocity partners, during official duty hours, regardless of the types of tasks performed underwater (i.e., working or scientific).

SECTION 3. POLICY.

.01 NOAA diving operations shall be conducted in accordance with this Order, including all Safety Manuals authorized by this Order and all OMAO diving polices. All NOAA diving operations shall also be conducted in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) commercial diving regulations as codified in 29 CFR 1910 Subpart T, or applicable alternate standards approved by OSHA.

.02 A copy of this Order, and all Safety Manuals, shall be made available to all dive team members.

.03 NOAA divers may deviate from the requirements of this Order provided the deviation is necessary to prevent or minimize a situation which is likely to cause death, serious physical harm, total loss of property, or major environmental damage; and the Divemaster or Lead Diver notifies the NOAA Diving Program Manager (NDPM), Line/Staff Offices Diving Officer (LODO/SODO), NOAA Diving Safety Officer (NDSO) and Unit Diving Supervisor (UDS) of the deviation within 24 hours of the onset of the emergency situation (e.g., a situation whose immediacy precludes otherwise required consultation and approval by the NOAA Diving

Control and Safety Board to prevent, minimize or address a critical, time-sensitive situation which is likely to cause death, serious physical harm, total loss of property, or major environmental damage.

.04 The NOAA Diving Control and Safety Board (NDCSB) may implement and enforce additional diving policies and standards than those stated herein, and in addition to applicable OSH Act standards. In no event shall any additional standard be applied in lieu of applicable OSH Act standards without meeting the requirements of 29 CFR 1910.17.

SECTION 4. RESPONSIBILITIES.

.01 Director, Office of Marine and Aviation Operations.

a. Overall responsibility for the NDP;

b. Delegates responsibility for administering and managing the NDP to the NOAA Diving Program Manager;

c. Reviews appeals from NOAA divers terminated from diving by the NDCSB;

d. Reviews issues raised by members of the NDCSB with dissenting opinions;

e. Reviews minutes from NDCSB meetings and provides guidance on issues raised by the Board;

f. Approves candidates for the membership on the NOAA Diving Medical Review Board; and

g. Makes final selection for the NOAA Diving Program Manager and NOAA Diving Safety Officer positions, and members of the NOAA Diving Medical Review Board.

.02 NOAA Diving Program Manager.

a. Implements all policies and decisions prescribed by the NDCSB;

b. Responsible to the OMAO Director for the management of the NDP;

c. Reviews recommendations from the NOAA Diving Safety Officer (NDSO) and takes appropriate action;

d. Suspends diving operations considered to be unsafe or unwise;

e. Investigates and reviews new diving technologies and techniques; and

f. Suspends or revokes diving privileges for violating the standards and procedures in this Order as directed by the NDCSB.

.03 NOAA Diving Control and Safety Board.

a. Exercises autonomous and absolute authority over and promotes the safe and effective operations of the NDP for both working and scientific dives;

b. Establishes such processes and program structure as necessary to effectively approve and monitor diving projects across NOAA's geographically dispersed diving program;

c. Reviews and approves all working diving operations involving equipment other than open-circuit SCUBA, breathing mixtures other than air, or depths greater than 100 fsw; all scientific diving operations involving equipment other than open-circuit SCUBA, breathing mixtures other than air or Nitrox, depths greater than 130 fsw, or bottom times beyond the U.S. Navy no-decompression limits; and new diving technologies and techniques for possible implementation;

d. Delegates authority to Unit Diving Supervisors (UDS) to review and approve routine dive operations conducted at the unit level.

e. Provides sufficient oversight to ensure safety exists within NDP;

f. Participates in safety assessments as necessary;

g. Advises the OMAO Director, and the NOAA Safety and Environmental Compliance Office (SECO) Director, of circumstances adversely impacting safety and/or efficiency of the NDP;

h. Instructs and reminds divers, Lead Divers (LDs), Divemasters (DMs), and UDSs to adhere to all NDP diving regulations, standards, policies, and procedures.

i. Serves as a board of review for inquiries into the nature and cause of diving incidents (including near-misses) as well as violations of NOAA or other applicable policies and standards, and reports the results to the OMAO Director and SECO Director (NOTE: For Class 'A' incidents involving a fatality or severe injury, or other cases constituting a "serious incident" under the NOAA Safety Policy (NAO 209-1), responsibility for the conduct of the official investigation and corrective action is retained by SECO);

j. Institutes appropriate measures to mitigate the reoccurrence of dive incidents;

k. Prescribes action for unsafe or noncompliant practices or actions.

l. Develops and promulgates standards and safety manuals, and reviews and revises them as necessary; reviews and makes changes in other NOAA diving regulations, standards, policies, and operational procedures; and reviews, adopts, and enforces physical conditioning and medical standards required to promote diver safety;

m. Monitors compliance with standards and safety manuals, including establishing such compliance inspection and certification programs as necessary, and reports non-compliance to the NDPM for action;

n. Establishes and/or approves training and certification programs for NOAA divers and non-NOAA divers participating in NOAA-sponsored dive projects; recommends to the NDPM the revocation of diving certifications; and considers appeals from divers whose dive certifications are suspended;

o. Determines equivalency of applicant entities with that of the NDP for diving reciprocity; and

p. Considers, reviews, and makes appropriate changes in diving equipment requirements.

.04 NOAA Diving Safety Officer.

a. Provides advice to the NDCSB, NOAA managers, and divers for working and scientific diving safety and health related issues;

b. Provides assistance with NOAA diving safety issues to other NOAA offices and coordinates resolution of NOAA diving safety issues as directed by the OMAO Director;

c. Coordinates annual safety inspections of all NOAA dive units and provides findings to the NDPM, NDCSB, and OMAO Director; and conducts an annual safety assessment of the NDP and such other ad hoc assessments as appropriate or as directed by the OMAO Director, and reports on the results of such assessments to the OMAO Director and the NDCSB including recommendations or actions taken to strengthen the safety and effectiveness of the NDP.

d. May permit portions of this program to be carried out by a qualified delegate, although the NDSO may not delegate responsibility for the overall safe conduct of the NDP;
e. Investigates, subject to and consistent with the incident investigation parameters in NAO 209-1, all Class B diving mishaps and provides findings to the NDPM, NDCSB, OMAO Director, and SECO Director (Appendix 14);

e. Suspends diving operations considered to be unsafe or unwise and reports this action to the NDCSB. Reauthorization for diving may be granted by the LODO/SODO after the completion of a Corrective Action Plan (CAP).

f. As directed by the OMAO Director, assesses appropriateness and consistency of diving safety requirements for NOAA federal, grant, and contract procedures, and provides recommendations to appropriate NOAA managers and the NDCSB.

.05 Line and Staff Office Diving Officers.

a. Conducts, or delegates, annual on-site diving unit safety inspections, and forwards reports to the NDSO by 31 January of each year;

b. Serves as subject matter experts, as requested, for the SECO and the SECO-assigned investigative teams for incidents involving a fatality or severe injury, or other criteria constituting a "serious incident" under the NOAA Safety Policy (NAO 209-1)(NOTE: Responsibility for conducting the investigation and tracking completion of corrective actions is retained by SECO);

c. Reviews diving accidents and incidents which are not covered in the previous item that occur within the respective Line/Staff Offices (LO/SO), and reports findings, recommendations, and/or proposed changes to the NDSO;

d. Suspends divers and/or diving operations considered to be unsafe or unwise;

e. Assists in administration of Diving Unit Safety Assessment (DUSA) program;

f. Assists as needed in planning and reviewing advanced and/or remote diving operations of assigned units, and ensures compliance with this Order;

g. Maintains familiarity with diving activities within assigned units and submits annual report to the NDPM by 31 October of each year for the preceding fiscal year;

h. Determines recertification requirements for divers whose diving authorizations have lapsed by more than 6 months per Section 3.5; and

i. Verifies accuracy of annual SEP assessment charges for assigned units.

.06 Deputy Line and Staff Office Diving Officers.

a. Serves as a voting member of the NDCSB; and

b. Assists LODOs/SODO in the performance of assigned duties as requested.

.07 Unit Diving Supervisors

a. Ensures all diving is planned and conducted in accordance with all prescribed NOAA diving standards, policies, and procedures listed in this Order, as well as all applicable OSHA standards outlined in 29 CFR 1910, Subpart T;

b. Ensures competent DMs or LDs are in charge of operations at dive sites;

c. Ensures all diving gear and accessory equipment is maintained in a safe operating condition;

d. Reports all diving-related accidents/incidents that occur within their units to their LODO/SODO as prescribed in this Order, and consistent with NAO 209-1;

e. Approves dive plans and Diving Emergency Assistance Plans (DEAP) for all routine dives involving no-decompression profiles, open circuit SCUBA, and using air or Nitrox as a breathing gas; and forwards a copy of all approved dive plans and Diving Emergency Assistance Plans (DEAP) to the appropriate DM or LD responsible for the dive operation and to NDC website.

f. Elevates to the NDCSB all non-routine dive plans and emergency assistance plans for approval prior to commencement of the diving operation;

g. Suspends divers and/or dive operations when deemed necessary and notifies the NDC and their respective LODO/SODO within 48 hours;

h. Ensures all divers are certified, properly trained, and fit to perform the required diving; and conducts a check out dive(s) with all recently certified divers or those transferring from another unit to familiarize them with local conditions, protocols, procedures, and unique hazards prior to permitting unrestricted operational diving;

i. Ensures that any diving conducted using specialized equipment or procedures (e.g., drysuits, full face masks, tethered or line-tended SCUBA) is practiced on an annual basis to maintain diver proficiency. Failure to meet these minimum standards requires work-up (refresher) dives to be conducted prior to making operational dives;

j. Ensures semi-annual air purity tests are completed on all NOAA-owned air compressors and takes corrective action if results are out-of-specifications as delegated by the UDS;

k. Assists in administration of DUSA program;

l. Disseminates NOAA diving standards, policies, and procedures to assigned divers;

m. Maintains or delegates to qualified personnel the responsibility of record keeping (e.g., Letters of Certification, training, and equipment) for assigned divers;

n. Conducts or delegates annual dive locker inspection and submits report to their respective LODO/SODO by January 15th of each year;

o. Submits report of unit diving activities for the preceding fiscal year to their respective LODO/SODO by October 15th of each year;

p. Prepares diver training applications and submits them to NDC;

q. Conducts operational training and conducts skills evaluation check-out dives as needed;

r. Keeps NDC apprised of changes to unit roster;

s. Tracks SEP equipment and ensures gear is returned to NDC upon departure of divers from unit; and

t. Verifies accuracy of annual SEP assessment charges for assigned divers; and helps facilitate collection of fees by ensuring a local budget office has the accounting codes from divers' supervisors.

.08 NOAA Diving Medical Officer

a. Maintains current education in the area of dive medicine;

b. Conducts reviews of dive physicals and other medical submissions; and makes determinations of medical fitness to dive;

c. Serves as an advisor to the NDPM regarding medical issues;

d. Provides medical services, training and advice in support of diving operations;

. Serves as a liaison between the civilian dive medicine community and the NDC;

f. Serves as Chairperson of the NDMRB and advisor on the NDCSB as appointed by the Director of the Office OMAO; and

g. Confers with NDMRB as needed to resolve fitness to dive and other dive medicine issues.

SECTION 5. STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES.

.01 Per section 4.03 of NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 200-3, titled NOAA Handbooks and Manuals, this Order authorizes the issuance of Safety Manuals to augment the policies, procedures, and guidelines in this Order and is intended to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the NDP by providing for the timely development and issuance of programmatic guidance to the NOAA diving community.

.02 Safety Manuals shall apply to all individuals and Programs involved with the NDP and have the same force, effect, and authority as this Order.

.03 The NDCSB shall update and maintain all Safety Manuals based upon recommendations from the greater NOAA diving community. Such recommendations shall be considered for implementation except in circumstances where the NDCSB believes the recommendation may hinder diver safety or program efficiency.

.04 Changes to Safety Manuals must be approved by a majority of the NDCSB voting members.

.05 The NDCSB shall request concurrence of the Director, Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (DOMAO), on all revisions to Safety Manuals that are potentially controversial and will advise the Director of any recommended revisions that are voted upon, but not approved by the NDCSB.

.06 Distribution of Safety Manuals may be accomplished in both paper and electronic form. The paper version will be in a form that allows for ease of updating. Updates will be distributed using sequentially numbered transmittal sheets issued under the signature of the NDPM.

.07 The NOAA Diving Center shall maintain a list of officials and organizations to receive a printed copy of the Safety Manuals and shall ensure that electronic versions are accessible on-line via the NOAA Diving Center (NDC) webpage.

.08 Information to be included in the Safety Manuals shall include, but is not limited to:

a. Safety procedures and checklists;

b. Definitions of scientific and working dives and criteria for differentiating between the two;

c. Program management;

d. Duties, responsibilities and qualifications of key positions, and the NOAA Diving Control and Safety Board and NOAA Diving Medical Review Board;

e. Classification of NOAA divers and minimum training and certification requirements;

f. Minimum manning and equipment requirements;

g. Dive parameters (e.g., depth, bottom time, minimum surfacing pressure);

h. Equipment procedures and checklists;

i. Recordkeeping and reporting requirements; and

j. Emergency procedures for fire, equipment failure, adverse environmental conditions, and medical illness and injury.

SECTION 6. EFFECT ON OTHER ISSUANCES.

This Order supersedes NAO 209-123, NOAA Diving Program, dated May 2, 2003.

William T. Broglie
NOAA Chief Administrative Officer

Office of Primary Interest:
Office of Marine and Aviation Operations