

Introduction

The underwater clean up activities carried out with the initiative of "AEGEAN REBREATH" and the collaboration and/or support from other organisations include diving in ports, marinas and open water, in order to trace, collect and remove marine litter from the seabed. These activities are based on the voluntary participation of both amateur and professional divers, who have read and understood beforehand the Volunteers Terms of Participation in the Coastal and Underwater Clean up Activities of "AEGEAN REBREATH" (here).

It is obvious that, by carrying out underwater clean up activities, "AEGEAN REBREATH" does not provide professional diving services or training courses of any kind or level, nor does it substitute for organisations that provide such services or courses according to their business purpose. As a matter of fact, "AEGEAN REBREATH" welcomes divers who wish to participate in the clean up activities on a voluntary basis, PROVIDED THAT they submit a relevant certification from a diving centre, with the required diving experience levels and skills, according to international standards.

Furthermore, taking into consideration that certain conditions in such activities may differ from the conditions existing during recreational diving, and having assessed the risks related to underwater clean up activities, "AEGEAN REBREATH" considers appropriate to inform divers beforehand, so that they can have a better knowledge of the conditions that may exist on the diving field, with a view to the safety of both divers and other individuals that may be close to them.

Therefore, this document has outlined and gathered together a set of useful guidelines for a smooth carrying out of underwater clean up activities, including recommendations for safe diving that are based on lessons of common experience and basic diving principles; naturally, these guidelines do not substitute for the required training and level certification of volunteering divers. Finally, although this document is mainly intended for those directly involved in an underwater clean up activity, such as divers and other individuals on the field assisting with the removal and discharge of marine litter, it is highly recommended it be read by all volunteers taking part in an activity, such as researchers, journalists, photographers, camera operators, etc.

In particular, this document includes briefly the following:

- A. Preparations before the activity
- B. Arrival at the field
- C. Diving
- D. Handling of problems
- E. Conclusion of the activity

A. Preparations before the activity

Each underwater clean up activity takes place on a preset date (usually on weekends), which is announced in a timely manner on the "AEGEAN REBREATH" website and social media. Individuals interested in participating in the activity are invited to express their availability, by filling in a relevant form. Normally, the list of participants is finalised in approximately fifteen days prior to each activity; at the same time, the coordinator of the activity creates a chat group in social media to facilitate communication among the group's members, who share information about their equipment along with other issues, such as their transportation, accommodation, etc.

To ensure the smooth management of these preparations, so as to avoid any possible misunderstandings, delays, etc., all persons involved in an activity are requested to observe the following:

- Try to be certain enough about your availability during the dates of each activity and notify immediately the members of the chat group of any change that might occur.
- Resolve promptly any question or other issue concerning the level certification you hold or the proper functioning of your personal equipment, and make sure that the information you provide is correct.
- Get informed on the development of preparations and confirm that you took knowledge of any updates shared among the members of the chat group.
- Exchange messages with the rest of the chat group members, when relevant to the topic and the underwater clean up activity, for which such chat group was created.

B. Arrival at the field

The underwater clean up activities take place in ports, marinas and open water during the day (usually in the morning and/or midday), provided there are favourable weather conditions. Upon arrival at the field, all persons involved are required to observe the following:

- Pay attention to the coordinator's guidelines regarding each activity and make sure you have fully understood them. Given that diving is performed in pairs, make sure you share all necessary information with your pair, especially as regards to the level, experience and skills of each other.
- Tell the coordinator about the number of dives you have performed and the periodicity of your diving activity.
- Try and check your personal equipment to make sure it functions according to the applicable standards, and use it only for the purposes it is meant for. If you notice any malfunction or anything unsuitable for diving, please refer immediately to the coordinator of the activity.
- Observe the diving field and surrounding environment, looking for spots that might hinder or pose a risk to diving, and refer to the coordinator in order to take necessary actions. Make sure you have spotted all entry and exit spots (such as stairs, safe passages, etc.), prior to diving.
- Comply with the recommendations and orders made by representatives of the Port Authorities that may be present on the field.
- Make sure you have met the volunteers that will be assisting you during the activity and remember the spot where they will normally be (usually on the shore, dock or aboard a vessel close to you) and maintain contact with them regularly.
- Do not dive if you show any signs of indisposition or any other condition that might pose a risk for your health or affect, in any way, the safety of diving.

C. Diving

As already mentioned, the underwater clean up activities are carried out in ports, marinas and open water. In these locations, there might be low or zero visibility conditions, due to depth oscillation, water waving, seabed composition, sea currents or other factors. This can make more difficult to trace and remove objects lying on the seabed. Also, low visibility can be a problem to identifying objects from a distance or estimating some of their features, such as their volume, shape, weight and composition, or even making a proper assessment of their overall condition, due to the alteration or degradation suffered from their long lying in the marine environment. In addition, when diving in locations like ports or marinas, it is probable that you will encounter several vessels at a short distance, such as fishing and recreational boats, as well as other items, fixed or movable, such as ropes, buoys, anchors, pillars, fishing tools, etc. So, all the above raise a challenge that volunteering divers may be faced with during an underwater clean up activity; needless to say, they should be aware of it beforehand, in order to decide to what extent they will engage in the activity, as

well as to make sure they move safely under the sea, without putting themselves or others at risk. For all these reasons, it is absolutely necessary to observe the following:

- Apply enhanced diligence and act with caution when moving under or in between vessels, and make sure you advance only if you are absolutely certain that you are not blocked by ropes, fishing tools or other objects.
- Check your equipment regularly for any impairment, as well as your air reserve.
- Do not move away from the delimited diving field; remain at the maximum depth you feel comfortable and, of course, do not exceed the training limits of your level certification.
- Always select the safest route that does not prevent you from floating.
- Keep visual contact with your pair at all times and, when moving at the surface, keep regular contact with the volunteers on the exterior.
- Carry a cutting tool with you.
- Remove litter from the seabed and put it into the sacks, without overloading them or putting protruding items in them, as this would make harder to carry them in the sea and would also hold back those helping you lift them on the surface.
- Check the items before you collect them, looking for any rust, sharp points, cuts or breakages, to avoid injury for both yourself and others. Be very careful when you collect them and try to carry them separately. When approaching to the volunteers on the exterior, always warn them so that such items are lifted and carried with caution.
- Do not collect very heavy objects on your own, without having previously consulted with the coordinator; also, do not use lifting balloons, unless you have received relevant training and know how to use them properly.
- Do not engage in an attempt to remove items from certain spots of the seabed, where conditions are challenging or require for more specialised skills than those you already have.

D. Handling of problems

After completing a relevant training course from a certified diving centre, scuba divers are usually able to recognize that diving activities require the following set of skills: sufficient knowledge of technical issues, good physical condition, cooperation with others and full compliance with safe diving standards. This document does not aim at listing the technical skills that all volunteering divers should obviously have beforehand; rather, it highlights the need to comply with all scuba diving standards, emphasising on the cooperation and team spirit among all persons involved in an activity, as key factors to handle successfully a problem or an emergency situation that may occur during diving. So, after having considered the above, all persons involved in an underwater clean up activity, are required to observe the following:

- Discontinue diving if you feel indisposition, fatigue, stress or any other condition that may put your health or life at risk, and follow safe ascent procedures to return to the surface, letting the others know that you need help.
- Warn other divers about any possible danger in the sea, using hand signals.
- Offer help to those who need it, without neglecting your personal safety at the same time.
- Use a cutting tool to untangle yourself from ropes, nets or other objects.
- If possible, warn the volunteers awaiting on the exterior, in order to seek immediate medical assistance, if necessary.
- If you find yourself in an emergency situation, keep calm and focused, and employ your technical skills to handle the situation.

E. Conclusion of the activity

After completing diving in the field, the underwater clean up activity is one step before its conclusion. All items lifted from the seabed are carried to a preset location at the shore, so that the final step of the activity –

that is selection, listing and disposal of such items – can begin. Although other volunteers participating in the activity are usually assigned with this task, volunteering divers may be also asked to assist them in completing this stage of the activity faster. Therefore, divers are requested to act as follows:

- Check your personal equipment, looking for any possible impairment, and make sure you keep it at a safe place, according to the instructions of the coordinator.
- Gather all the material you used during diving, such as tools, sacks, ropes, lifting balloons, etc., and return them to the coordinator.
- Assist others with carrying or removing items at the shore or dock, if necessary, and make sure you wear appropriate clothes and shoes to avoid injuries.
- Let the coordinator know if you are about to leave the field, and report any other issue concerning the diving that took place during the activity.
- Do not forget to provide feedback from your overall participation in the activity; sharing information and experiences with each other will contribute to improving clean up activities in the future.

To sum up, it is worth mentioning once again that in order to carry out the underwater clean up activities, "AEGEAN REBREATH" relies on the voluntary participation and the excellent collaboration among all persons involved. Participating in such activities can be a very rewarding experience, not only in terms of joining a collective effort aimed at protecting the marine environment, but also because of the many things one can be benefited from; acquiring new skills and experiences, strengthening relationships and recognising the importance of collaboration and team spirit, are only a few of them. However, above all these stands the safety of all persons involved. For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to follow closely all safe diving standards, along with anything else dictated by common sense and experience. This is the way to ensure a successful outcome for all underwater clean up activities and to increase our willingness and determination to keep pursuing our goals.