ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# Scuba Diving

Schools must follow the Department’s Excursion Policy and Guidelines and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

SCUBA diving is an underwater swimming activity involving the use of self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA).

School SCUBA diving activities generally can be classified into two types:

* an introductory SCUBA activity with training in the use of SCUBA equipment in a pool, basic SCUBA theory and, possibly, an introductory dive in open water
* SCUBA training towards the achievement of a recognised SCUBA diver qualification.

These guidelines apply to introductory SCUBA activities.

Any SCUBA diving beyond an introductory activity, or where students are working toward SCUBA qualifications, must be conducted according to the Australian Standard AS 4005.1 Training and Certification of Recreational Divers.

## venue Definitions

Aquatic excursion supervision and qualifications in these guidelines are built around the following location type definitions:

**Swimming pools** – refers to programs conducted for the purpose of teaching swimming and water safety. Programs should include a variety of activities involving, swimming, water safety, survival techniques, and rescue and emergency procedures. It does not apply to water activities such as recreational swimming, surfing, canoeing, boating etc.

**Inland waterways** – inland waterways can be dams, lakes, reservoirs and very slow flowing rivers with no swift water features. Inland waterways may vary widely in depth, water visibility, turbidity, temperatures and hazards.

**Enclosed waterways** – any declared port waters by Maritime Safety Victoria and include areas such as bays, non-surf beaches, channels, inlets and estuaries. See the [Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook](http://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety/recreational-vessel-operators/powerboat/victorian-recreational-boating-safety-handbook) for all listed port waters.

**Coastal inshore waterways** –include all beaches with direct access to ocean waters, any beach exposed to ocean swell, and any beach that is exposed to currents, rips, strong winds or surf. This may include enclosed waterways at times with these features.

**Coastal offshore** – all waters greater than two nautical miles from the coast.

Where possible, programs taking place at coastal waterways should be conducted at patrolled beaches. Staff may find [Beachsafe.org.au](https://beachsafe.org.au/) a useful reference when planning activities in coastal waterways.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See Excursions Guidelines: Staffing for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher or an external provider, or a volunteer (See [Volunteers in Schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy) policy).

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity. An assistant instructor role may be filled by a volunteer (See: Volunteers in Schools Policy).

## Student preparAtion and skills

Activities should begin with a check of students’ current health, confirming that all are cleared for diving, knowledge, skills and experience in water environments and the activity.

Schools must consider the swimming competency of students in particular water environments when deciding on their suitability to participate in a SCUBA program. Students can be classified as either:

* **Beginner swimmers**

Students with little or no experience including in shallow water.

* **Intermediate swimmers**

Students with basic skills, able to swim 25 metres with a recognisable stroke.

* **Advanced swimmers**

Students able to swim 50 to 100 meters using two recognisable strokes and to demonstrate one survival stroke in deep water.

First time SCUBA students and beginners must be instructed in basic skills, taking into account factors such as activity area conditions, weather and the progress of students.

To participate in introductory SCUBA training in a pool, students must be able to demonstrate the ability to submerge and resurface confidently without SCUBA equipment.

Current medical information about students must be obtained. For pool training, the standard Department excursion medical information form can be used, together with a medical information form designed specifically for SCUBA diving. See [Medical History – Introductory SCUBA Experience Only (doc - 280.5kb).](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/scubamedhist.doc)

If the introductory SCUBA experience is not in a pool and is in water that is more than chest deep and/or includes a dive, a medical information form designed specifically for SCUBA diving must be completed. In this case all students must have obtained within the previous three months, an [AS4005.1 of diving fitness](http://www.divemedicals.com.au/) from a certified dive medical practitioner.

It is recommended that all participants intending to SCUBA dive seek medical advice prior to the activity.

Where students with one or more of the medical conditions listed below want to participate in an introductory SCUBA experience, they may do so only if they have obtained within the previous three months, a certificate standard AS4005.1 of diving fitness from a certified dive medical practitioner:

* chronic ear infection
* perforated eardrum
* epilepsy, seizures or blackouts
* chronic bronchitis.
* severe asthma
* heart or lung conditions.

For SCUBA diving beyond the introductory experience, all students must have obtained within the previous three months, an AS4005.1 of diving fitness from a certified dive medical practitioner.

Where there may be doubt about a student’s fitness to SCUBA dive because of a temporary illness, such as a cold, flu or hay fever, a certificate from a medical practitioner may be requested.

Before a SCUBA activity in open water, students must demonstrate that they can, without using a mask, fins, snorkel or flotation equipment:

* competently swim 200 metres on the surface of the water using a recognised stroke
* float and/or tread water for ten minutes.

SCUBA diving is recommended for students of at least 15 years of age. Students should have the physical strength to carry the equipment, the ability to follow complex instructions and the maturity and responsibility to understand and implement the necessary safety procedures. SCUBA diving is not recommended for primary school students.

Care should be taken to ensure equipment is of proper design and fit for age, build and size of students. Wherever possible the need for manual handling and heavy lifting should be minimised.

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology.

Students must be taught the following skills as part of their first training session:

* clearing and replacing the face mask
* clearing and replacing the regulator
* achieving positive buoyancy while on the surface.

Students must be able to demonstrate competence in these skills prior to additional diving activities.

Additionally, students should be taught:

* buoyancy concepts: how to gain and maintain positive buoyancy, and as underwater depth increases, the effects on buoyancy on increase in pressure
* the dangers of separation from the group
* hyperventilation and hypothermia
* ‘squeeze’ in ears, sinuses, mask and lungs – the pressure-depth relationship
* techniques to equalise pressure in ears and mask air space
* techniques to equalise pressure in the ears when descending
* entry and exit methods
* self-rescue techniques
* correct finning technique
* hand signals, for example, OK, not OK, distress
* safety practices, such as the buddy system - responsibility for a diving partner where one dives and the other stays on the surface, ‘one up, one down’
* marine dangers, for example, blue ringed octopus.

Before students can proceed to open water beyond the introductory SCUBA experience, they must be deemed by a qualified SCUBA instructor to have demonstrated the required standard of theory and pool training. To progress to more advanced dives, students must hold, or be training for, the appropriate SCUBA qualification for that level of diving.

Records should be kept of students’ prerequisite abilities. See:  [Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge​ ​ (doc - 139kb).](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc)

A student safety briefing must be held at the SCUBA diving location and include such information as:

* establishing the boundaries of the SCUBA diving and the out-of-water waiting area
* defining and explaining the response plan for any accident or other emergency that might occur.

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and must meet applicable industry safety standards.

Divers’ flags must be used for all SCUBA activities in open water and displayed at the site at all times to indicate divers in the area or below the water surface

##### Buoyancy vests

Buoyancy vests should be an appropriate design and size.

##### Fins

Fins should be properly fitted and match the dive conditions.

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##### Mask and snorkel

Masks must fully enclose the diver’s nose and be made of tempered glass. Masks must have no tears or physical damage that would limit correct function. A variety of masks should be available to ensure a proper seal.

Snorkels must be attached or attachable to the mask and have no visible tears or damage.

##### Tanks and regulators

Tanks carrying compressed air must be of appropriate size and volume, and tested to Australian Standards.

Compressed air source must be tested quarterly to verify gas quality to a minimum of Grade E

Standard or higher.

Each regulator set should have a primary and secondary (octopus) demand valve and a contents gauge. A depth and timing device must also be attached for dives beyond eight metres.

##### Weight systems

Weight systems must have a quick release mechanism.

Proper weighting should be encouraged. Students should not carry excess weight.

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##### Wetsuits

In open water, ocean dive wetsuits are required and their thickness must be suitable for the local conditions. Wetsuits must be worn by all participants.

##### Clothing

Before and after the activity, students need to protect themselves from the sun, for example with a shirt and hat, and cold and wet weather, for example with a towel and change of clothing, including a jumper, long pants and jacket. Sun protection clothing should be handy to students when they leave the water.

##### Hygiene

All equipment must be washed in suitable disinfectant after all activities or at any time where there is a planned exchange of equipment from one person to another. The designated instructor is responsible for providing equipment and instruction on correct process for disinfecting SCUBA equipment. Teaching staff should also supervise this process.

##### First aid kits

Emergency oxygen must be available for SCUBA diving activities.

Participants with asthma must have medication for emergency treatment as close to them as practicable.

## Clothing

Before and after the activity, students need to protect themselves from the sun, for example with a shirt and hat, and cold and wet weather, for example with a towel and change of clothing, including a jumper, long pants and jacket. Sun protection clothing should be handy to students when they leave the water.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

The designated SCUBA instructor(s) must have:

* a current SCUBA instructor certificate from a recognised certifying organisation
* a current qualification in the administration of oxygen
* current experience and knowledge of the dive site.

Other staff, if diving with the group, must be qualified divers and be able to document competency and recent experience in SCUBA diving.

Where a powerboat is used to accompany divers, the boat and driver must comply with Victorian maritime safety regulations, see: [Transport Safety Victoria – Maritime Safety.](http://www.transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety)

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers.

## Supervision

Supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with responsibility for the activity instruction and the other to assist the instructor.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for SCUBA diving.

|  |
| --- |
| Swimming pools |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–12 |
| Inland, enclosed and coastal waterways – introductory dive |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–4 |

Any staff in excess of the minimum ratio who are out of the water, for example, supervising staff in the boat, need not have SCUBA diving qualifications, but must have the swimming, lifesaving and CPR ability to assist in an emergency.

Any adults learning to SCUBA dive must be included with students for the purpose of staff–student ratios.

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with the

Excursions Guidelines – Supervision.

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Divers Alert Network <http://danasiapacific.org/>

Dive Medicals <http://www.divemedicals.com.au/>

Royal Life Saving Society Australia ­– Bronze Medallion <http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/training/bronze-medallion>

SCUBA Divers Federation of Victoria <http://www.sdfv.org.au/>

SCUBA Schools International <http://www.ssidiving.com/>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au/>

Maritime Safety Victoria <https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety>

Victorian Public Pools Register [https://lsv.com.au/pool-safety-services/victorian-pool- register/](https://lsv.com.au/pool-safety-services/victorian-pool-%20%20%20register/)

Surf Life Saving Australia – BeachSafe <https://beachsafe.org.au/>

For further enquiries please contact community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au

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