It has been proposed that a suitable person, or group, travel to the Cook Islands and hold a series of seminars or other teaching sessions with doctors, nurses and divers in Rarotonga, to provide education about diving accidents and their management. We hope that some funding will be provided by the Cook Islands government or pearl farm owners. Apparently the Cook Islands are an amazing part of the world, the Northern Group especially, and the diving is supposed to be wonderful! If anyone is interested in helping to organise this, or to go and educate, please contact either Dr Michael Kluger, the Chairman of the NZ Chapter of SPUMS, (Phone NZ 09-307-7440, fax NZ 09-307-2814, e-mail m.kluger@xtra.co.nz.) or myself (Phone NZ 09-416-8541, fax 9-416-8543).

Lyndsay Wheen
Secretary, NZ Chapter of SPUMS

Key Words
Safety, training, underwater medicine.

MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS AND CERTIFICATES FOR WORKING DIVERS

Division of Workplace Health and Safety Department of Training and Industrial Relations PO Box 820, Lutwyche Queensland 4030 22/8/97

Dear Editor

Enclosed is an information sheet, SAFETY LINK, Medical Examination for Underwater Divers, Information for Doctors.

This information relates to the Workplace Health and Safety compliance standard for underwater diving work which took total effect in Queensland on 2 July 1997.

Instances have been observed where working divers have not been provided with a certificate providing the necessary information, not been subjected to the examination as required in accordance with the Australian Standard AS 2299-1992 and have not been examined by an appropriate medical practitioner.

It would be appreciated if the information could be published.*  

Brian Marfleet  
Workplace Health and Safety Inspector

Key Words
Diving medicals, standards.

* See pages 135-137

ROYAL ADELAIDE HOSPITAL HYPERBARIC MEDICINE UNIT

Basic Course in Diving Medicine  
Content Concentrates on the assessment of fitness of candidates for diving. HSE-approved course
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Overseas 61 8 8224 5116
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BOOK REVIEWS

SOLO DIVING.
Robert Von Maier.
Watersport Publishing Inc. PO Box 83727, San Diego, California. 92138, USA.
Price from the publishers $US 12.95. Postage and packing extra. Credit card orders may be placed by phone on +1-619-697-0703.

Key Words
Safety, solo diving.

Diving with a buddy has long been the tenet of the various training agencies, ostensibly to make those people who are inherently insecure in the water feel safer. We know that often these buddies see each other only on entry into and exit from the water and it is these buddies who let the system down. However, until every scuba diver is fitted with through water communications to his companions, both in and out of the water, then all scuba divers are essentially solo divers.

We have all seen the dive master of the day wander round a dive boat arbitrarily selecting buddy pairs whom we know to have vastly different skill levels. Does the experienced diver, with say 500 dives under his belt, increase his safety if he is paired with a novice who has just finished his, or her, “advanced” course and has done 10 dives?

Von Maier has written this book is to encourage every diver to become self-sufficient so that, if left alone for any reason, he or she will be able to cope with the situation. The author is not advocating that all divers dive alone, far from it. In this book he is questioning the blind adherence to one of the earliest platforms of the instruction agencies, that if you are diving with a companion you are less likely to get into trouble. If this is so, why do divers continue to die?

Ideally, the buddy system should match two divers of comparable skill and experience levels who share the same interests, maintain a constant vigilance over each other and their gauges before, during and after the dive and always remain in close contact with each other should immediate assistance be required. In 40 years of diving I have never seen this happen. There are some dives where the depth and nature of the dive prohibits all but the few very experienced divers, for which it is very difficult to find an appropriately skilled and experienced buddy, so that it may be more prudent to do the dive solo.

To be a self-sufficient diver Von Maier advocates that the diver needs to have better than average water fitness, be self critical and be able to assess both the conditions and his own physical abilities, skills, training and experience to make each dive a safe one. Perhaps, most importantly, the diver must know his own limitations.

In chapter 4 on Dive Management Guidelines the author promulgates two rules. Firstly Never solo dive deeper than twice the depth to which you can free dive. Secondly A solo diver’s underwater distance from the point of exit should not exceed the distance he can comfortably and easily swim, equipped with full scuba gear, on the surface. To these one should add Neumann’s First Law of Diving: Always dive with air in your tank. I have no problems with any of this. I also strongly agree with the author’s statement on page 48; “One’s competency and proficiency as a self-sufficient diver are directly proportional to one’s free diving abilities.” “A good breath-hold diver has a better chance of becoming a competent scuba diver than a person whose free diving skills are lacking.” The chapter continues with a discussion on air management, how to calculate rates of air consumption, thermal protection and buoyancy control.

Chapter 5 then discusses alternative ways of complying with Neumann’s First Law of always having a gas supply. He mentions alternative air sources (which, in the American idiom, he insists on calling alternate) such as the octopus regulator should the primary regulator fail, double tanks with a manifold and redundant supplies such as the Spare Air or a pony bottle.

Chapter 6 is an anthology of personal opinions on solo diving from a number of “names” in the scuba diving world, not all of whom I respect or hold in very high regard. Then follows a glossary of diving terms, which I feel is rather unnecessary in a book of this nature.

I agree with the author that every diver should be self-sufficient, be responsible for his own equipment and actions and be able to extricate himself from any untoward circumstance without having to rely on another diver. Sharing a dive with a buddy can make that dive much more enjoyable, but the lack of a buddy should not necessarily preclude any dive.

The book is small, quick and easy to read with a chatty but highly opinionated style. It does not provide a step by step guide to solo diving or, more appropriately, self sufficient diving but it does call into question the belief that buddy diving is, by definition, safer. It is a book that should be read by all experienced divers but not all these divers should follow the practice. There are some “divers” who should not be allowed in the water, let alone dive solo.

Key Words
Safety, solo diving.

David Davies
COLD WATER DIVING - A GUIDE TO ICE DIVING.

John N Heine.

Best Publishing Company, P.O.Box 30100, Flagstaff, Arizona 86003-0100, USA.

Price from the publishers US$ 17.95. Postage and packing extra. Credit card orders may be placed by phone on +1-520-527-1055 or faxed to +1-520-526-0370.

Few divers in the South Pacific region get an opportunity to dive in really cold water and, unfortunately, spectacular under-ice vistas will remain only an “armchair experience” for most readers of this journal. Nonetheless, ice diving is possible in a few highland lakes in southern Australia and New Zealand. For those lucky enough to dive in such settings, this small book provides an excellent introduction. For other readers, its copious, high-quality colour photographs (121 photos in 127 pages) can serve as a window into an inherently interesting field of human activity.

The author, John Heine, is certainly well experienced in this field, having dived extensively in cold and under-ice conditions in Alaska, Antarctica and various lakes in the Rocky Mountains. He is the Diving Safety Officer for Moss Landing Marine Laboratories at California State University and is currently President of the American Academy of Underwater Sciences. He is also certified as an Ice Diving Specialty Instructor. As such, he is ideally placed to write an up-to-date guide on the topic of cold water diving.

In 1973 NAUI first published a small, but extremely useful, book entitled “Cold weather and under ice scuba diving” by Lee Somers, from the University of Michigan. The need for subsequent reprints of this monograph up until quite recent years, demonstrates a continuing requirement, from both scientific and recreational divers, for a practical guidebook in this field. However, technical advances during the intervening couple of decades have rendered obsolete certain sections of Somers’ book. This new work by John Heine not only corrects any such shortfalls, but offers a number of valuable new insights.

The book appears to have been designed as a training manual for ice diving courses. However, it wisely starts with the warning “This book is not a substitute for scuba diving or ice diving instruction. You must be certified for diving in cold water and under ice” (I am not sure whether the pun is intended!). There are chapters on the cold water environment, training, equipment, ice diving operations including preparation of the ice-hole, and safety and emergency procedures. Most of the text is excellent, with plenty of good, sound, practical advice. Medical aspects are touched on, with about 14 half-pages (the other half of each page being photographs) devoted to topics such as frostbite, hypothermia, management of heat loss victims, the unconscious diver, and what is curiously listed as “conscious diver with lung overpressure or DCI”. While these medical sections may be considered as adequate, they are perhaps the weakest section of the book.

If I were to offer any other criticism of the text it would be directed at the author’s literary style, rather than at the information he presents. For example, as previously mentioned, the book is generously illustrated with a range of excellent colour photographs, but these are somewhat diminished by the banality of the accompanying captions. A random selection came up with the following gems of what Basil Fawlty would scathingly call “the bleeding obvious”: “Cold, wet divers can become hypothermic in cold weather conditions”; “The tether line is the route back to the dive hole in low visibility conditions”; and “Diving from small boats in ice conditions requires careful attention to environmental conditions”. All undeniably true, but perhaps a touch irritating in their over-simplification.

This minor quibble aside, “Cold Water Diving” is a highly useful, up-to-date and practical guide. It makes stimulating reading for anyone interested in the general field of diving, and should be considered essential for any adventurous soul even contemplating taking up ice diving.

Peter Sullivan
Australian Antarctic Division

Key Words
Accidents, environment, thermal problems, safety, training.

DIVING MEDICAL CENTRE
SCUBA DIVING MEDICAL EXAMINER’S COURSES

A course for doctors on diving medicine, sufficient to meet the Queensland Government requirements for recreational scuba diver assessment (AS4005.1), will be held by the Diving Medical Centre at:

Bond University,
Gold Coast, Queensland.
Easter 1998

Previous courses have been endorsed by the RACGP (QA&CE) for 3 Cat A CME Points per hour (total 69)

Information and application forms for courses can be obtained from

Dr Bob Thomas
Diving Medical Centre
132 Yallambee Road
Jindalee, Queensland 4047
Telephone (07) 3376 1056
Fax (07) 3376 1056