

Safety & Equipment Maintenance

You can't have one without the other...

It's something that every one of us talks about. It is also the most likely task to be put off, overlooked, or abbreviated. Ocean Eye, Inc.'s **Chris Gabel** asks, how do contractors maintain equipment without losing precious billable time?



This Poseidon Jetstream First Stage has not been properly maintained.

Take a look, for example, at the first stage regulator found in the accompanying images. This particular piece is a Poseidon Jetstream first stage that hadn't been overhauled in three years. As a result of lack of proper cleaning and maintenance, its condition is deplorable.

Maintenance. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it's defined as the upkeep of property or equipment, derived from *maintenir* (Old French). It's the word that we all preach but so many of us are guilty of not executing on a daily basis. There are those out there that don't practice it at all. The military has always believed in PMCS (Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services) and has created literally thousands of volumes that contain the intimate tasks and schedules for maintaining everything from screwdriver to a missile system.

The pertinent question is; Why has maintaining equipment been so neglected?

Our dive gear is our lifeline to the surface world, and yet how many of us delay even routine maintenance or ignore the daily check sheet. Commercial divers suffer on the job death at a rate of

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40 times the average of other workers according to the Centers for Disease Control. Duke University found that dive accidents in recreational diving happen at a rate of about 1 in 100,000.

In the same study, the rate for commercial divers was shown to be 1 in 10,000. Although commercial divers log significantly more time as individuals, the dive accidents reported to Duke University were based on all recreational diving over one year.

How do we make the profession of diving safer, and yet stay profitable? Different larger diving operations have different methods of maintenance. Some have a large cache of redundant gear. That's not necessarily feasible for small and medium size companies.

The tens of thousands of dollars needed to keep all of the additional unused gear bought, housed, and maintained doesn't always make sense or is affordable. Some organizations even have their own technical staff that can dedicate all of their time to equipment upkeep. But now you have to employ staff whose entire focus is on the preservation of apparatus.

So where does that leave the rest of the industry?

The last thing that most company owners and employees want to see is more forced regulations by local and federal governments. Although sometimes necessary, a volunteer approach to better safety is always the more efficient route to take. The first step to resolving these issues is to create company and personal policies that all pre-dive and post-dive check lists are completed. This needs to be accomplished not only in spirit but in execution. Another step would be to identify potential hazards. Hazards such as cracked air lines, a malfunctioning mic, or perhaps a leaking regulator can result in an aborted dive in the best case scenario or an accident in the worst. Due to the liability issues that

have cropped up in the last few decades, equipment manufacturers have painstakingly created warnings, check lists, manuals, and other documentation that educated the diver/tender and releases them from the costly lawsuits that have plagued all industries. Most manufactures now issue pre-dive, post-dive, daily, monthly, and annual check lists.

Another part of effective preventative maintenance policy is to engage a reputable service center to keep your equipment working at its optimum efficiency. It should be a shop that has the training, certification, insurance, and qualifications to service the specialized gear that makes this industry what it is today. The company should be attentive and make note of any special working atmospheres. Areas need to be addressed such as diving in hazardous materials, construction, rescue, salvage, as well as any other focus a diving company may have. Technology is constantly changing. Gear is be-

coming more complex and yet more reliable at the same time. Although that is all positive, it also means that service technician needs to remain constantly trained in order to meet the challenges of servicing these increasingly complex devices.

Today's divers are consummate professionals that work in hazardous environments. Those dangers can be mitigated by proper maintenance, modern gear, and continued training. Working together, the service centers and diving contractors can make the industry safer, more productive and revenue friendly. A faithful commitment should join the two groups of professionals, both the diver and technician, to make a safer and more profitable industry for all that participate. **UW**

Have a comment or question for Chris Gabel? You can reach him at cgabel@ocean-eye.net.



Poseidon Jetstream First Stage. This shows the deplorable condition a piece of life support equipment can be in without proper maintenance.

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