

When Is It Time to Give Up the Gear?

It's like having a dysfunctional relationship. Not exactly something out of Jerry Springer, but close. You've had that helmet for 15 years, it leaks like you're wearing a colander. You're still wearing that drysuit you bought in the early nineties and have more patching material than original suit left.

Chris Gabel asks:

~~Where do we stop the~~ **MADNESS?**

Well, you can go on Dr. Phil's show and talk about your childhood. Or you could take a long hard look at your commercial diving inventory and be honest with yourself.

Let's assume that you're not wanting to become (in)famous and take the latter of my two suggestions. First, take a look at your inventory. What do you have? How old is it? When was the last time that you had it (whatever it may be) serviced by a trained professional either on your staff or from a reputable organization that has the proper training (this does not mean Fred's Bait Shop and Emporium)?

I'm not saying you should simply throw out all of your gear after a certain period of time. What I am saying is that there is a time when gear is serviceable and there is a time for the trash bin to be fed.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Let me give you some examples. I recently received a Gorski hat, and the second stage regulator had corroded to the helmet shell. It took about two hours of soaking time and some gentle persuasion to get the regulator out. It looked bad, *really* bad. When it did come out, things were *growing* on it. It was a lovely shade of green (you get the picture).

However, with some quality time in the ultrasonic cleaner and some elbow grease, that Cyklon looked almost new. So something like that was completely serviceable and will work for years to come.

Conversely, a friend of mine showed me his Kirby Morgan 17B that had seen much better days. The bent tube was bent all right, bent in a lot more directions that it had been originally. The interior of the regulator was harboring forms of life that some biologists would have been clamoring over to identify and name for themselves.

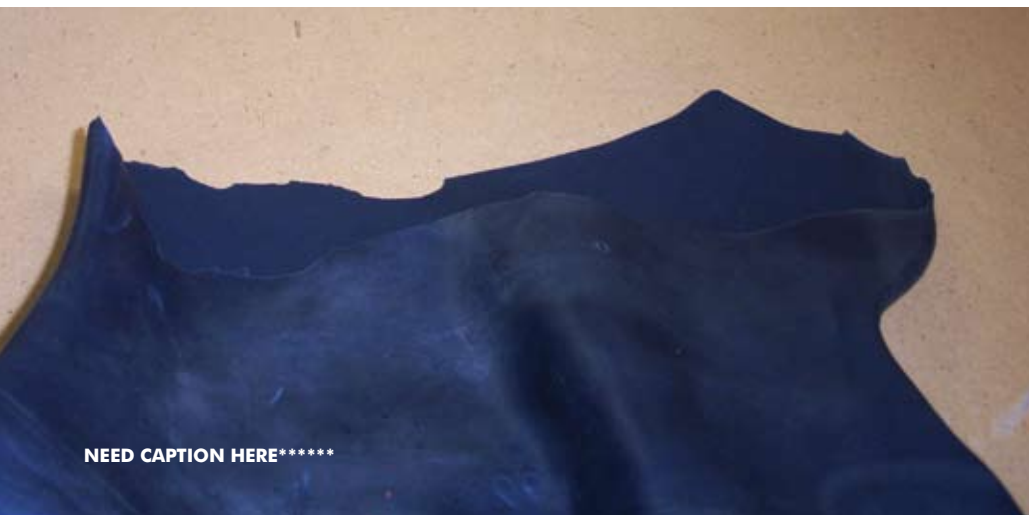
Although that could be cleaned, the roller lever was bent to the point of breaking, the regulator cover was all but smashed in, and most of the chrome was lost long ago. The shell itself was deeply gouged. The ears below the de-watering valve were in bad shape. One was broken off and the other chipped.

Suffice to say, it was time to use this hat as more of a display than a working piece of equipment. Could



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Hunter 1/2 island Is this new?

it have been serviced? Sure, if you wanted to replace a myriad of parts. Basically, in the end, there would have been more parts replaced than original parts remaining.

IT'S NOT JUST HELMETS, EITHER...

Although this should be an obvious example, there is always debate on whether or not a piece of diving equipment is worth the time, effort, and investment to service. Some divers seem to have a personal relationship with their equipment and find it increasingly difficult to retire the piece when it's time.

That said, as in this example, when it is time to retire that hat you have two thousand plus dives on, put it on the mantle. No one is saying that you have to throw it in the trash, just don't put it underwater (at least with anyone in it at the time).

Drysuits are another great example. There are suits that look bad, but are fine structurally. I've seen suits that look like they were beaten to death, but under closer inspection, they were relatively new.

In one particular case, the diver was inspecting dolphins and didn't realize the adhesive properties of creosote. So the suit came out looking like a patch quilt of red vulcanized rubber and black tar. It cleaned up and has been put back in service.

I've also had drysuits come in for service that had more dry rot than useful material left. When you flexed the material, you could see the deep grooves of broken rubber. Although the suit at the time may have only had two or three complete breaches that needed to be patched, there were a plethora of others on the brink of failing structural integrity. Basically, you would have to replace significant, if not entire, sections of material.

THE END OF THE LINE

"Okay, so much for the horror stories," you say. "What do I do?"

I'm glad you asked. It comes down to opinion, experience, and self-honesty. If something is questionable, then you have to take a long hard look. Get professional opinions from your staff and from a reputable service center.

I know, you need to keep in mind that a lot of service centers also deal in new equipment. I understand that hesitation, so get another opinion. Try a different shop and listen to what they have to say. If you think it's questionable, your staff thinks the equipment is getting to that retirement stage, and you have at least one service center telling you it's time to put it in the closet, then replacement time is here.

You also have to answer that age-old debate of how much money you want to spend to the return on investment you're going to achieve. In the Kirby Morgan 17B example, my friend would be putting more money into fixing the hat than he would be by purchasing a new one.

Not only would he have a helmet that was reliable and safe, he also gets the advantage of a tax break. Yes, believe it or not, you can make money by spending it. I'm not an accountant, so hopefully you have one to discuss your particular situation, but here is the quick fifty-thousand-foot view.

TAX ADVANTAGES TO NEW GEAR

There is a certain time frame that you can depreciate your equipment that actually offsets your income. In other words, you retire that drysuit, buy a new one and take it off of your taxes for a certain number of years. (This is where you need to talk to your accountant. I tried but he gives me a headache when he goes over the details.)

What does this mean to you? Well, you and/or your divers are safer. They're going to be theoretically happier. Your taxes are lower (from the tax credit) and supermodels will call you on a regular basis praising your good looks and intellect. (Okay, that one was made up.) (Unless they do, and if that's the case, write me, I want to know your secret!)

The bottom line is that we work in a tough industry that's, lets face it, not the safest (I'm waiting for the Discovery Channel to stop doing fishing shows and start getting Mike Rowe to narrate a TV series on some *really* dangerous undersea work).

All kidding aside, we all need to take

gear evaluation seriously and honestly. Sometimes, the equipment may just look ugly but be in great operational shape. Other times, that's not the case. I know that this economy makes parting with funds a hard thing to do, but it is safe to say that it's better to replace something now and spend the money than be either sued later by the family of a fallen diver or by the company you were working with. It's my personal philosophy that surprises happen on-site, so let's keep the equipment in top shape so that gear failure won't be one of them.

Next issue, I would like to do something different. I'd like you to send in some maintenance questions that you want to have answered. You're the reason that these articles are written, so I want to work on subject matter that you are interested in. Send your questions to me via email at Cgabel@Ocean-Eye.net or you can snail mail them to me at

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Let me know if it's alright to add your name and company name on the credit for the question. If your question is chosen, we'll send you a \$5 gift card to Starbucks so that you can get properly caffeinated.

Dive safe. **uw**



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