

# Diving Without a Partner: PADI's Position

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## Overview

PADI's overall training programs and philosophy support the proven system of diving with a partner for several reasons, not the least of which are its contributions to diver safety. PADI also recognizes that experienced divers, after being trained in the skills, knowledge and safety techniques of diving in a self-reliant manner, can be prepared to dive independent of a partner. Those experienced divers, through proper training (as in the PADI Self-Reliant Diver Specialty course) learn knowledge and skills in dive planning, life support system readiness, adaptive training, equipment preparedness and diving responsibly to compensate for situations when diving alone.

## Background

### **Why PADI advocates the use of the buddy system**

The buddy system in use today for scuba diving came from a decades old water safety concept found in swimming and lifeguard training. It was adopted because it applies to diving and because it makes good safety sense. Early support of buddy diving safety procedures was referenced by Jacques Cousteau and the crew of the *Calypso* in the book *The Silent World*. The goals of training divers include developing the skills to take responsibility for themselves and to be self-reliant. The buddy system provides divers in training with a safety redundancy to this skill base that diving alone simply cannot provide. PADI has, and will continue to, train divers using the buddy system based on its proven benefit to diving, divers and diving safety.

### **Practicality and Convenience**

The buddy system has provided tangible contributions to millions of dives. Buddies provide an extra set of eyes and hands for each other. Providing assistance in putting on equipment, adjusting straps, assisting with weights and tanks, entering the water, helping to load and unload gear are but a few practical arguments that support the buddy system.

### **Safety**

The roots of the buddy system arise from diving and water safety. Early days of diver training heralded the buddy system as an important safety procedure because only through the buddy system could a diver reasonably expect to escape from entanglement, entrapment, out of air situations, disorientation, a head injury, chest pains, cramping and dozens more. Diver training and diving equipment have improved, yet these same values apply today. Like all safety-based systems, the buddy system is not perfect. However, the simple fact is that without a buddy in the water, the distressed diver has little or no chance of assistance. The buddy system is the most basic form of scuba diving fail-safe. Buddies have helped each other in subtle and profound ways for decades. Often the smallest buddy intervention averts a string of error chains occurred and negative outcomes or tragedy. The safety record of scuba diving has improved dramatically over the past few decades, while the number of certified divers has increased.

During this time, buddy system training techniques have been an integral component of this training. While there is no way to quantify the accidents that were prevented or did not happen because of one buddy looking after another, empirical outcomes support the relevancy and integrity of this training.

## **Enjoyment**

Diving is a social activity, so the buddy system is more than a safety rule. Diving with someone you know and are comfortable with adds to the fun. Most divers actually enjoy companionship in and out of the water. It is fun to share exciting adventures and experiences with others. Fundamentally, the buddy system is about dive companionship, something that won't appeal to misanthropic personality types.

## **What is self-reliant diving?**

Self-reliant diving is when you plan your dives so you can respond to emergencies independently, whether you are diving with a partner, team, or alone. If diving with a partner or in a team, your team mates may provide you with additional resources but self-reliant diving means that you do not rely on your team mate or buddy to be your primary emergency response. In self-reliant diving you have the skills and knowledge to focus on and respond to diving emergencies without assistance. Self-reliant divers are comfortable with self-rescue skills so that in an emergency, the diver is equipped and prepared to react independently.

That said, the self-reliant diver also identifies and is aware of other divers in the water who may be able to help should a need arise. This should be part of an ongoing awareness—similar to building a picture of the other cars around you when you are driving. The self-reliant diver should understand the roles these divers can play such as a source of gas or navigation assistance. Sometimes just knowing you are close enough to other divers to get their help allows you to stay calm enough to help yourself. Self-reliant divers may position themselves near the group/someone in the group to increase the chances of help being available.

## **Can diving without a partner be done responsibly?**

Yes, but let's be clear about what responsible diving without a partner is and what it is not. It requires experienced scuba divers willing to make the necessary commitment to train and equip themselves to accept the added risks involved. That is to say, it requires someone with the attitude and aptitude to do it responsibly. This is true in other adventure sport activities such as rock climbing.

To dive without a partner requires diligence, experience (such as 100+ buddy-accompanied dives), and the ability to plan for and apply the specialized procedures and equipment needed to engage in the activity. When divers choose to dive alone within this description, PADI sees a place for it. PADI's Self-Reliant Diver course provides training for experienced divers in the use of redundant equipment and specialized equipment configurations as well as specific dive planning, and management of diving problems and emergencies that can occur when diving alone.

Responsible self-reliant diving is diving alone with the correct mental discipline, attitude and equipment. That said, no amount of redundant equipment can effectively back up a diver's brain better than another person.

## **What concerns does PADI have with regard to solo diving proponents who denigrate the buddy system?**

When a problem occurs on an independent dive, or when the diver is alone in the water, there is little or no chance of assistance for the distressed diver. This decreases the chances of a diver surviving the problem or having a favorable outcome. Diving alone reduces the chance of survival regardless of the problem. Since 1989, there were at least 538 fatalities where it was clear divers were either intentionally diving independent, or became separated from a buddy and were de facto alone.

PADI is concerned by certain proponents of independent diving within the dive industry who attempt to promote independent diving by deriding the buddy system with headlines touting "Why the Buddy System is Dangerous." This is both irresponsible and reckless. To suggest that the buddy system fosters a false sense of security and increases the likelihood of panic is contrary to the empirical evidence. To claim that divers shouldn't use the buddy

system for fear of being sued by a diving companion is ridiculous. The unfortunate reality in the litigious U.S. is that people have sued one another for nearly anything. It is no surprise that there have been a handful of cases where one buddy has brought suit against another. Outside of the U.S., this argument doesn't hold up and smacks of fear mongering.

## **Conclusion**

PADI's position is clear; independent diving proponents should advocate responsible independent diving on its own unique merits, requisite training, and equipment needs and not through sensationalized attempts to disparage a proven safety system that has served the majority of recreational scuba divers well.