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## THE WORLD AS IT IS

### THE DIVERS ALERT NETWORK TODAY

John Lippmann

#### Key Words

Oxygen, rescue, research, training, transport, treatment.

The Divers Alert Network (DAN) is a not-for-profit organisation which was formed in 1980 in the United States to assist in the treatment of underwater diving accidents by providing a 24-hour emergency hotline. When government funding for this service evaporated, DAN established a membership program. For a small payment, subscribers received a diving accident manual and a regular newsletter, *Alert Diver*, dealing with various issues of diving safety.

As the popularity of diving and dive travel increased, numerous situations arose when divers with symptoms of DCI were stranded in remote locations without the funds required to pay for an expensive evacuation to a recompression facility. In the early 1980s, dive insurance was very difficult to obtain and DAN lobbied hard to enable divers to get access to appropriate insurance coverage. As DAN grew, it was able to provide its members with a worldwide evacuation service and diving injury treatment insurance.

DAN organisations have been established in several regions. These include DAN Europe, DAN Japan, DAN S.E. Asia-Pacific (SEAP) and DAN Southern Africa. DAN SEAP was established in 1994, and provides services to most

countries in the Asia-Pacific Region. Together, the DAN organisations form the International Divers Alert Network (IDAN). These autonomous organisations work co-operatively towards a common goal of improving diving safety and treatment services worldwide. At the end of 2001, there were more than 205,000 DAN members worldwide.

The aims of DAN SEAP include improving diver safety through education, providing evacuation and insurance services for injured divers, improving the management of diving and other accidents by the provision of appropriate first aid training, oxygen provider training and equipment, support for regional diving emergency hotlines, diving accident data collection and research.

#### Improvement of dive safety through education

All DAN members receive a copy of *Alert Diver*, a regular journal dealing with various aspects of dive safety and health. The various DAN entities also conduct workshops and seminars relating to safety issues, and have large websites with a variety of useful health and safety information on them.

#### Provision of evacuation and insurance services

All DAN SEAP members automatically become eligible for emergency medical evacuation cover, for up to US\$100,000, for diving and non-diving emergencies that occur more than 80 km from home. Members also have access to a variety of economical dive injury treatment insurance plans, and in some cases, personal accident plans.

### First Aid Training

DAN SEAP has also introduced some general and workplace first aid programs that teach participants the skills required to provide first aid in the home or the workplace as well as in the field. Topics include bleeding, respiratory and cardiac emergencies, fractures, soft tissue injuries, head injuries, diabetes, epilepsy and convulsions, envenomation, poisoning, and many others.

The courses, which are equivalent to those offered by Red Cross and St John, are suitable for divers and non-divers alike. They have been accredited in Australia under the National Training Recognition Scheme, as well as by certain workplace authorities.

DAN has also introduced short programs on the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and on marine envenomation.

### Oxygen first aid training and equipment

DAN has been instrumental in the development of certain types of oxygen units which are designed to provide a simple, safe and effective means of providing oxygen to injured divers. Additionally, armed with the knowledge of the importance of oxygen in the first aid management for decompression illness (DCI), DAN has created a highly effective and successful oxygen provider program designed specifically for divers.

This program covers the training of oxygen providers, divers able to administer oxygen to casualties, and of instructors who run local courses for oxygen providers.

#### DAN OXYGEN PROVIDER COURSE

This program is suitable for divers of all levels, from novice to instructor, and is now the most respected oxygen program for divers worldwide with more than 132,000 oxygen providers and 16,500 oxygen instructors trained from its inception to the end of 2001.

It consists of a 4-hour oxygen provider module, supported by an additional resuscitation module, where required. Topics covered include diving accident recognition, the benefits of oxygen provision, precautions and safety guidelines and oxygen provision to both responsive and unresponsive victims.

Participants are certified in the use of the DAN Oxygen Unit, or an equivalent system. In addition, there are several extension modules for divers who require further training in devices such as the MTV100, REMO<sub>2</sub> and bag-valve-mask systems.

### Regional diving emergency hotlines

IDAN supports a network of diving emergency hotlines throughout the world. These hotlines are available to all divers, whether DAN members or not.

DAN SEAP provides full funding to the DES Australia hotline and to the hotlines in New Zealand, the Philippines and Malaysia.

### Diving accident data collection and research

Another important function of the Network is collecting and analysing data on diving accidents and fatalities to improve the understanding of the causes of such accidents and to develop better treatment methods.

DAN entities produce regular reports on dive accident and fatalities. DAN SEAP published a comprehensive report on the Australian diving deaths from 1972-1993.<sup>1</sup>

It is soon to release a compilation of the Australian fatalities from 1994-1998. In addition, DAN SEAP is now actively involved in the collection of dive fatality data throughout the region and aims to produce more comprehensive regional accident reports in the future.

IDAN has been involved in extensive research projects that include flying after diving, ascent rates, diabetes and diving, project dive exploration (downloaded dive computer profiles), post-diving Doppler studies, PFO and diving, and many more.

DAN entities are also involved with providing assistance to remote recompression chambers, donating equipment and providing expertise where appropriate and in various other ways to help to further the safety of the magnificent sport we are privileged to participate in.

We remain very grateful to all those who support us in our mission.

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