

**Keywords:** conservation; coral reefs; environment; marine recreation; preferred practices for good environmental behavior; SCUBA diving, snorkeling, SNUBA diving.

***Voluntary Standard for  
Recreational SCUBA diving and Snorkeling Activities  
in West Hawaii Waters***

**Prepared by:**  
**Members of the West Hawaii Community**  
with the assistance of the Coral Reef Alliance.

**Abstract:**

This voluntary standard specifies requirements for environmental performance, conservation practices and operational safety that enhance SCUBA and SNUBA diving, and snorkeling activities while minimizing environmental impacts of recreational usage on fragile marine ecosystems in the waters of West Hawaii - particularly near-shore coral reefs, related coastal environments and impacts on marine species such as cetaceans, turtles, monk seals, and other animals.

*This standard was developed by community members within West Hawaii representing key interest groups with the assistance of the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) and the West Hawaii Standards Taskforce (WHST). WHST and CORAL disclaim all liability for its use, application, or adaptation. This standard is subject to revision at any time and must be reviewed every five years and if not revised either reaffirmed or withdrawn.*

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## **FOREWORD**

*(This Foreword is not an official part of this standard,  
and is included for information purposes only.)*

This voluntary consensus standard is the product of a (number)-member taskforce representing four interest groups:

Supplier: People who provide services such as shop owners or guides (diving, snorkeling, kayaking, wildlife viewing etc);

Purchasers/Consumer: Hotels, concierge or others who actively book clients on tours or environmental associations such as dive clubs or photography clubs;

Local Communities: State, Federal, or Non-Government Organizations employees

General Interests: Local community members with knowledge and interest to assist in creating marine recreational standards with no particular affiliation with with the above categories..

The widely recognized due process practices defined in the Standards Engineering Society's standard SES-2, Model Standards Development Procedure, were followed in developing this standard.

Suggestions for improvements to this standard are welcome. They should be sent to the Chairman of the West Hawaii Standards Taskforce, c/o CORAL, 351 California Street, Suite 650, San Francisco, CA 94104, USA, or [standards@coral.org](mailto:standards@coral.org).

# Voluntary Standard for SCUBA Diving and Snorkeling Activities in West Hawaii Waters

## 1. Scope:

This West Hawaii voluntary standard specifies requirements and best practices for marine recreation providers of recreational SCUBA and SNUBA diving, and snorkeling operations and their clients in vulnerable marine ecosystems and related coastal environments. These practices will enhance safety and minimize impacts on marine ecosystems and marine animals. The standard addresses four critical areas:

- Elimination of impact to the marine environment, particularly coral reefs, and related coastal environments, and the organisms that live completely or partially within these environments;
- Environmental education of staff and clients on best practices;
- Minimum environmental education qualifications for those leading guided snorkeling and SCUBA diving activities or providing equipment to independent snorkelers or SCUBA divers;
- Safety and operational practices not already specified in existing regulations.

The standard does not specify curricula or practices for certifications, qualifications of instructors, or related subjects covered by appropriate licensing agencies.

## 2. Referenced documents

West Hawaii Voluntary Standard WHVS 1 - *Voluntary Standard requirements for Recerational Wildlife Interactions in Hawaiian waters*<sup>1</sup>

West Hawaii Voluntary Standard WHVS 2 - *Voluntary Standard requirements for recreational boat operations in Hawaiian waters*<sup>2</sup>

West Hawaii Voluntary Standard WHVS 3 - *Standard requirements for recreational shoreline activities in Hawaiian waters*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Available online at <http://www.coral.organization/>\_\_\_\_\_, or from CORAL, 351 California St., Suite 650, San Francisco, CA, 94104, USA.

### **3. Definitions:**

#### 3.1 Coral reef conservation

The act of preserving and protecting coral reefs, related near-shore ecosystems, and coastal environments from degradation.

#### 3.2 Coral reef ecology

The study of organisms in their coral reef environment that includes the interactions within this environment.

#### 3.3 Divemaster

A person who holds a current professional-level rating from a recognized training agency (such as PADI, NAUI, SSI, YMCA) at a level of “divemaster”, equivalent or higher and who has sufficient knowledge, skill and experience to plan, organize, supervise, and lead dives to known sites within the region, and possesses personal rescue and rescue management skills.

#### 3.4 Environmental briefing

Information on ways and reasons to minimize impact on coral reefs and related coastal environments while SCUBA diving and snorkeling verbally presented by a divemaster, snorkel leader, captain, or naturalist prior to engaging in the activity.

#### 3.5 Guided SCUBA diving

Organized SCUBA diving where clients are accompanied by a divemaster appointed by the marine recreation provider.

#### 3.6 Guided snorkeling

Organized snorkeling where clients are accompanied by a snorkeling leader appointed by the marine recreation provider.

#### 3.7 Harassment (Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) official definition)

Any act of pursuit, torment or annoyance that

- (a) injures or has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild; or
- (b) disturbs or has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of natural behavioral

patterns, including, but not limited to: migration, surface breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

### 3.8 Independent SCUBA diving

SCUBA diving activities in which individuals are not accompanied by a divemaster but have rented equipment from a marine recreational provider.

### 3.9 Independent snorkeling

Snorkeling activities in which individuals are not accompanied by a snorkel leader but have rented equipment from a marine recreational provider.

### 3.10 Marine Protected Area (MPA)

An area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal or state laws and/or regulations to provide protection and conservation of all the marine, terrestrial, and cultural resources within its boundaries.

### 3.11 Marine recreation provider:

Entity (business, individual, or organization), including any individual acting on behalf of such entity, which offers one or more of the following services to individuals as for hire.

(a) training, education or information sharing on SCUBA, snorkeling, kayaking, surfing, or other marine recreational activity.

(b) Guided operations of SCUBA diving, Snorkeling, Surfing, kayaking, marine wildlife viewing, sightseeing, or rental of powered or unpowered boats, with or without crew, or other recreational activity

(c) Rental of recreational snorkeling, SCUBA diving, kayaking, surfing, or other marine recreational activity equipment.

(d) Environmental education prior to or during guided activities, or prior to the rental of equipment, to persons participating in marine recreational activities.

(e) Entities providing a tour through transportation to an area for shoreline activities, such as bus drivers and tour guide operations. This shall not include when such entities are only hired for to transport customers.

### 3.12 Safety briefing

Information sharing by marine recreation providers that instructs and guides those participating in SCUBA diving and snorkeling activities in safety and operational practices prior to engaging in these activities.

### 3.13 SCUBA diving

Underwater recreational activity which utilizes a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA), rebreather apparatus or surface-supplied compressed air apparatus where air is delivered to one or more divers through a hose (such as SNUBA diving) or other ways of breathing compressed gas under pressure.

### 3.14 Snorkel leader

A person who has sufficient knowledge, skill, and experience to plan, organize, supervise, and lead snorkelers to known sites within the region.

## **4. Requirements:**

### **4.1 Operational Practices**

The following requirements apply to all marine recreation providers providing guides, instructors or equipment for recreational SCUBA diving and snorkeling operations.

4.1 SCUBA divers are encouraged to always dive with a divemaster, but it is not mandatory. During guided SCUBA diving group size shall not exceed eight certified divers per divemaster. When a group consists of more than eight divers, additional divemasters shall be used to ensure safety and environmental practices are upheld by all divers. Divemasters shall model appropriate behavior, share information, and demonstrate leadership to clients, both above and below water, by enforcing all provisions of Annex A.

4.1.2 All recreational SCUBA diving or snorkeling activities involving wildlife interactions shall fully comply with the West Hawaii Voluntary Standard for wildlife interactions, WHVS 2. Those involving boating activities shall fully comply with West Hawaii Voluntary Standard for General Boating, WHVS 1, and any shoreline activities shall fully comply with West Hawaii Voluntary Standard for Shoreline Activities, WHVS 3.

4.1.3 All boats conducting SCUBA diving excursions shall carry an emergency oxygen unit on board.

4.1.4 All marine recreational providers shall ensure that no persons are left behind on leaving a snorkel or dive site.

4.1.5 During guided SCUBA diving and snorkeling excursions marine recreation providers and their staff are responsible for pointing out poor behavior (in a positive and supportive manner) to divers and snorkelers while in the water. After a dive or snorkel operators and their staff shall provide information on why and how to adjust this behavior to generate positive outcomes.

4.1.6 Staff must be properly trained in management of clients who disregard rules or display ignorance of environmental impacts associated with inappropriate diver or snorkeler behavior. After training, dive and snorkel leaders shall have practical tools and methods at their disposal for taking corrective action, including the following: verbally communicating with the client in a positive, reassuring, and – when possible - courteous manner; warning second time offenders they may be banned from diving activities; either banning third time offenders from activities or restricting access to only coastal areas that will not be affected by their behavior.

4.1.7 Marine recreation providers shall not sell fish food; promote or participate in fish feeding; or allow clients to fish feed, including discarding food products overboard or, through negligence, allowing items to blow overboard - other than those previously eaten.

4.1.8 Clients shall be provided the opportunity on a voluntary basis to submit confidential evaluations of staff performance and satisfaction with the overall dive experience through an exit survey. An example of an exit survey is provided in Annex C.

4.1.9 Marine recreation providers shall voluntarily rotate dive sites with fragile habitats to avoid their degradation and allow their recovery, and cooperate with other suppliers; managers of marine protected areas and other responsible agencies to

- a) foster sustainability by collaborating with researchers and managers of marine protected areas to establish limitations on the number of boats and divers that visit popular sites at a given time and in monitoring reefs to evaluate their condition;
- b) promote installation of permanent buoyed moorings at dive sites;
- c) communicate with other vessel operators to locate and share moorings.



4.1.10 When SCUBA diving and snorkeling from shore, entry and exit routes shall be used that avoid walking on corals.

4.1.11 Bad practices and violations by marine recreation providers or their clients, observed by other marine recreational providers shall be reported to the manager or owner of the offending marine recreational provider's company. If action is not taken by the marine recreational provider to correct the activity individuals shall be reported to local authorities and managers of marine protected areas in cases where activities were illegal.

## **4.2 Training and Briefing Requirements:**

4.2.1 All staff with responsibilities on board boats or in the water shall be trained in the recreational marine provider's procedures for diving and snorkeling and safety practices including boat handling, navigation and communications. These staff shall maintain current certifications in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Staff responsible for divers shall also possess current emergency oxygen training certificates.

4.2.2 Marine recreation providers and their assistants shall be educated in coral reef ecology and conservation, including information on threatened, endangered and rare species that are unique to the local environment. Staff shall stay current with latest environmental trends and information, through formal or continuing education or review courses, self study and seminars such as those supported through the CORAL reef Reef Leadership Network, SeaGrant West Hawaii, The Kohala Center or other local entities free of charge.

4.2.3 Marine recreation providers shall demonstrate leadership and role modeling both above and underwater by enforcing all provisions of the preferred practices for environmental behavior specified in Annex A. Verbal pre-dive briefings shall review these preferred practices and alert divers to the impact of poor diving practices on coral reefs, related coastal ecosystems and wildlife. Briefings may be facilitated by use of a whiteboard, video, handouts, or other educational materials (see 4.2.6) but these aids are not substitutes for verbal briefings.

4.2.4 In addition to a verbal briefing covering material in Annex A, prior to the first dive or snorkeling excursion divemasters and snorkel guides shall ensure all clients are presented or briefed on the material in Annex A in one additional method of the five listed below which marine recreation providers shall obtain from the CORAL Leadership Network and other supportive local conservation groups.

- (a) Reef environmental practices video
- (b) Regulator tag
- (c) Bag Tag

- (d) Environmental pledge (Annex B, Hawaii Island Recreational Scuba Association's (HIRSA) or Division of Aquatic Resource's (DAR))
- (e) Environmental pledge bookmarks

4.2.5 Marine recreational providers that rent SCUBA or snorkel gear for independent shore excursions shall ensure all clients are verbally briefed on the environmental information presented in Annex A. In addition to the verbal briefing all clients shall be presented in one additional method of the five listed below with the information from Annex A.

- (a) Reef Environmental Practices video
- (b) Regulator tag
- (c) Bag tag
- (d) Environmental pledge (Annex B, HIRSA's or DAR's)
- (e) Environmental pledge bookmarks

The best practices for safety good environmental behavior specified here are a mandatory part of West Hawaii Voluntary Standard WHVS 4 - *Standard requirements for SCUBA diving and Snorkeling in Hawaiian Waters*

## **Annex A**

### ENVIRONMENTAL BRIEFING OUTLINE AND CHECKLIST FOR SCUBA DIVING AND SNORKELING

1. Describe the local rules, regulations or laws that apply to the area; provide examples of bad practices and violations; and provide contact information of local authorities;
2. Provide a description of environmental, biological, and physical features of the dive or snorkel site – this can easily be done with the use of the coral, manta ray or marine mammal flip chart;
3. Advise on proper snorkeling, SCUBA diving techniques specific to the characteristics of the marine environment in which the snorkeling or SCUBA diving activity is to be carried out, such as sandy bottoms, reef walls, and fragile local wildlife;
4. Review with clients the preferred practices for good environmental behavior specified in this standard and this Annex;
5. Encourage snorkelers and SCUBA divers to provide feedback on compliance with the code of good environmental behavior by the marine recreation provider and its staff through use of an exit survey at the end of the excursion;
6. Include fundamentals of buoyancy control in each pre-dive briefing; check if SCUBA divers are over-weighted; observe SCUBA divers both above and underwater in order to identify buoyancy control problems, and help adjust their diving weights if necessary. If buoyancy problems persist, divers shall remain over sand or rubble areas;
7. Ensure that all snorkelers and SCUBA divers understand that the health of coral reefs and related coastal environments shall not be compromised by any activity, including photography, and provide specific advice on proper snorkeling and SCUBA diving techniques when in environmentally sensitive areas;
8. Take appropriate action in the event snorkelers or SCUBA divers cannot or do not comply with the rules, regulations or laws that apply in the area and the good environmental behavior specified in this standard and this Annex.

The best practices for safety good environmental behavior specified here is an optional part of West Hawaii Voluntary Standard WHVS 4 - *Standard requirements for SCUBA diving and Snorkeling in Hawaiian Waters. Other pledges from DAR, HIRSA or other approved entities can also be used.*

## ANNEX B

### ENVIRONMENTAL PLEDGE FOR SCUBA DIVING AND SNORKELING

The precious coral reefs of Hawaii are facing many serious threats from human actions. Divers, snorkelers and other recreational users can harm coral reef ecosystems if they behave carelessly and do not show respect for marine life. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Hawaiian reefs every year so small individual actions can add up to have a significant effect. Because we care about our coral reefs and want to do everything possible to reduce human impacts, we ask that you commit to not participating in potentially destructive behavior.

Following these rules of responsible marine recreation will help you to better understand and appreciate coral reefs while you help to preserve this unique ecosystem for future generations. If you want to learn more about coral reef ecosystems and the thousands of creatures that depend on them, ask your guide or instructor to recommend websites and literature or check out:

[www.givethereefabreak.org](http://www.givethereefabreak.org).

"I have received a briefing about the SCUBA diving or snorkeling activities or both in which I am about to engage, and this pledge indicates my awareness of the potential impact of my activities upon the reef environment and associated marine wildlife.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to minimize my impact to the sensitive coral ecosystem by following these rules of responsible marine recreation below.

I Promise to:

1. Never touch, stand-on, or kick coral reef or live coral.
2. Carefully select points of entry and exit to avoid damaging areas of the reef.
3. Secure all dangling equipment and accessories.
4. Maintain neutral buoyancy at all times (divers).
5. Maintain a comfortable distance from the bottom that does not kick-up sediments or allow me to come into contact with the reef while SCUBA diving, snorkeling, or free diving.
6. Never throw food or rubbish into the water or feed fish.
7. Never chase, move or manipulate marine life or habitat.
8. Move slowly and deliberately in the water.

9. If new to Hawai waters I will go with a guide the first time, or at minimum seek local knowledge to orient myself to local waterways, ocean conditions, marine life and local guidelines and regulations.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The model Exit Survey shown here is an optional part of West Hawaii Voluntary Standard WHVS 4 - Standard requirements for SCUBA diving and snorkeling in Hawaiian Waters. Operators are encouraged to adapt this survey to their needs to gain feedback from customers with the help of the Coral Reef Leadership Network.

**Please complete both sides of this survey**



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Which company were you on a tour with? \_\_\_\_\_

How important is it to you that your tour company engages in good environmental practices?

Very Important	Important	Of little importance	Not Very Important	Not at All Important
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on your experience today, how important are good environmental practices to the company you went out with?

Very Important	Important	Of little importance	Not Very Important	Not at All Important
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What things did your company's staff say or do that make you think this?

Did your company present any information regarding good environmental practices?

Yes	Maybe	No	I don't remember
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If yes, what sorts of things did they talk about or show you?

How would you characterize the information provided by the operator?

**Check all that apply**

- New information, I learned something
- Good information, but I already knew it
- Common sense information, but good to hear out loud
- Okay information, everybody knows this stuff
- Incorrect information
- I believed the information was made up
- Useless information

Will anything you saw or heard today change how you behave within the marine environment in the future?

Yes                      Maybe                      No                      I don't know  
                                                                 

Please explain.

When engaging in marine recreation:

- It is okay to touch coral reef animals, but only with your hands
- It okay to touch coral reef animals, but only for educational purposes
- It is not okay to touch coral reef animals

Before and during your excursion, did the company:

**Check all that apply:**

- Show an educational video
- Give you an environmental tag attachment (rental bag or dive gear)
- Have you sign an environmental pledge
- Give you an environmental bookmark

The oral environmental briefing your company gave included the following information:

**Check all that apply:**

- There was no oral environmental briefing
- Never touch, stand on, kick coral reefs
- Never feed, chase, move or manipulate wildlife
- Secure all dangling equipment and accessories
- Maintain neutral buoyancy at all times
- Never throw rubbish into the water
- Move slowly and deliberately in the water
- The need to protect coral reefs through our actions
- Any information specifically on marine mammals

*Thank you for completing CORAL's voluntary survey! As a benefit to providing us with your feedback, you may **receive a complementary 3-month membership to CORAL**, which includes: Currents- our newsletter, E-Current- our online newsletter, a seafood watch card and our regular conservation updates.*

*If you would like to receive our 3-month complementary membership, **please include the following information (all of which will be kept confidential):***

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone # (optional):