5 tips to avoid accidents on dive boats

Boat diving can be so much fun – but, unfortunately, dive boats can also be injury-prone places.

Due to its wetness a dive boat is mostly a slippery place. Some may also find it difficult to balance due to the waves. These and other conditions can lurk on deck potentially causing accidents and injuries.

Some Alert Diver magazine issues earlier we reported on two occasions of ripped-off fingers which struck us as pretty extraordinary cases. Divers jumped off the boat and got caught on some kind of boat's screw with their wedding ring.

Much more common are incidents like a finger being bruised or even crushed by the boat ladder after a dive – undoubtfully very painful.

Finger injuries are one thing, having someone jumping on you or being hit by a scuba tank, is something else. When head meets metal or tank hits spine, very serious injuries can occur. Some can be fixed, others can't and the diver may end up with a permanent disability.

For instance, there was a case last year when a diver got hit on his head by a scuba tank from another diver who jumped off the boat later than the instructor had instructed the group. The diver who got hit still continued to dive because he felt okay. However, once back on the boat after the dive, he developed a paralysis of one side of his face, a so-called facial paralysis. After being hospitalized and months later this disability was still persisting, indicating that the incident had caused some neurological damage to his brain and the Nervus facialis that innervates the face muscles. This is a serious condition and it not only marks a person for life but it also makes speaking, eating, and drinking very difficult, hampers the eye-closure reflex and also puts scuba diving to the past.

Another case happened very recently in April this year. A dive master was hit by a scuba tank in the neck by another diver jumping on him. Besides a two-minute-lasting unconsciousness and severe pain later on, he had one broken vertebra in his cervical spine which affected proper movement of one of his arms. Two CT scans at an international hospital were necessary to show the injury and decide that he had to undergo neurosurgery immediately to fix it and to prevent worse from happening. The surgery went well and several screws and a titanium plate later in his spine, the dive master is recuperating.

Surely, no-one wants this to happen on their holidays or at all. And no-one probably wants to be the diver doing this to others. Worst case is permanent paralysis, or even death.

So, how can we prevent accidents like this?

First of all, nobody should ever just jump off a boat and land on someone else's head, neck or back. Pay attention. A quick glance to check if the water beneath is clear is the least we should do.

Secondly, listen to briefings and follow the procedures on board when boat personnel instruct divers to jump at a certain time – don't jump too early, neither too late. There is a reason for the exact timing.

Third, always stay alert and aware and watch out for yourself and for your dive buddies, especially when they are inexperienced.

Fourth, once in the water, start seeking a bit distance from the boat immediately, so no-one can jump on

you.

Fifth, if you have been hit by a scuba tank or a jumping diver, the best advice is to abort the dive immediately and wait a day until you are sure that you feel alright. If not, seek medical advice immediately. It would not be wise to continue diving and finding out underwater that a vertebra of the spine is broken or a concussion is developing. Especially, when the pressure changes underwater can worsen the effect. Be warned by sharp pain or pain at all, numbness, vertigo, nausea, vomiting, tingling sensation, limited mobility, headaches – these are all warning signs and should be taken seriously.

The skull and the spine are fragile and the brain and the central nervous system are very vulnerable.

The brain, neurological control center of our body, can swell when hit heavily. However, a swollen brain cannot expand in the constricted space of a bony skull. In turn, the swelling can cause compression of the brain and eventually lead to partial neurological deficits, if not complete neurological loss of control or loss of consciousness. This sometimes develops with some delay to the actual incident. If underwater, it can lead to permanent disability or be fatal.

DAN Europe regularly launches safety campaigns to raise awareness for more safety in diving. Get informed, get involved.