Hibernation Versus Education

Some divers choose to hole up in the winter months, acting more like hibernating bears than adventurous water lovers. It seems the only time you see these elusive creatures is if they need a new snorkel for a tropical dive escape. Travel, however, should not be the only reason divers venture from their “caves” sporting dive gear.

“Active” is a relative term meaning different things to different people: Most divers generally fall somewhere between being nearly dormant when things frost over and diving several times a month. When it’s blustery outside, finding ways to get motivated may simply hinge on thinking of diving from a different perspective. With a little planning and creativity, you can continue to nurture your diving habit throughout the year.

The most obvious winter diving activity in cold climates is ice diving. Though not for everyone, hardy divers will find it pretty cool (pun intended). With a little forethought, convincing your buddy to participate in diving that requires a chain saw may be easier than you think. This is an excellent chance to expand your horizons as you look for new challenges, but what else can you do that doesn’t require dealing with frozen water?

Everybody, Into The Pool!
There are countless activities that will allow you to remain active while requiring minimal time outside. Many of these begin with a swimming pool and add up to a better-prepared diver.
It stands to reason that skills of inactive divers deteriorate faster than those of active divers. So why not grab your buddy and head over to your local dive center for a practice session? Dive centers everywhere recognize that the winter months are great times for skill improvement, so they’ll feature buoyancy workshops, rescue refreshers, drysuit orientations and underwater photography / videography practice sessions.

Buoyancy: learning to hang
Exceptional buoyancy skills are important for all divers. The ability to avoid disturbing fragile marine life, remain off the bottom to preserve visibility and complete safety stops all require consistent attention to buoyancy control. A pool allows you to work on these skills in a controlled setting. Buoyancy clinics also give you the chance to work on your weighting. Generally, you’ll find that the amount of weight you needed when you first started diving is no longer necessary. Experience allows you to be more relaxed underwater, resulting in better breathing control. Slow, deliberate breaths can effectively be used underwater to make minor buoyancy adjustments, but only if properly weighted.

A pool also allows you to try different weighting configurations with varying degrees of exposure protection, with and without hoods, gloves and vests. Make a friendly wager with your buddy to see who can shed the most weight from your weight systems, ensuring, of course, that you leave enough to make a simulated safety stop with a near-empty tank.

Rescue Me: practice makes perfect
Buoyancy skills aren’t the only ones worth practicing. A pool is an excellent place to practice rescue skills. They include responding to out-of-air situations, leg cramps and panic, and range from entry-level training, unconscious divers underwater and at the surface, panicked divers and egresses, among others. You may audit a scheduled rescue class – assuming you’re a certified rescue diver – to practice these same skills with new rescue divers. And if you and your buddy aren’t rescue divers, this might be the perfect time to

sign up for such a course.

Drysuits: warm and wonderful

As wintertime exposure protection, drysuits are great – and absolutely necessary in some areas. They may be just what you need to extend your dive season. With various drysuit styles and additional equipment configuration requirements, give it a try in a pool before you commit to the purchase. Your local dive center and instructor can best guide you toward the right system and can even provide you with needed information and training to make your transition from a wetsuit to a drysuit an easy one.

Shoot it: make memories and hone skills

For underwater photo and video enthusiasts, there may be no better time than a winter pool dive to work on camera technique and composition. Investing in a few roles of film (or batteries for your digital camera) or videotape for pool practice will pay dividends on future dives. Some dive centers have been known to set up some "artificial reefs" on the pool bottom that may include toys and other objects that require you to maneuver around to get the right shot. This requires more focused attention to your buoyancy control while composing the shot, taking the photo or video and then extricating yourself from the area without disturbing the artificial reef.

If the weather is frightful

Even if you decide that jumping in the pool – even if it is indoors – in the dead of winter just isn't your idea of fun, you can continue diving through the winter without even so much as a drop of water. We all need to keep our CPR and first aid skills current in the event we are needed for assistance, whether at a dive site or walking down the street. Courses on using automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and providing oxygen are also naturals for divers. Remember that the general dive population continues to age, making training in the use of AEDs very appropriate for divers.

Check in with your DAN Instructor, who may have these courses and others scheduled: There's always plenty more to learn, no matter if you need the entire course or simply a refresher. Why not use those frigid days to enhance your ability to lend a hand? Though the weather turns a little chilly and the water freezes over, you can still enjoy dive activities yearround. For information about other courses, including the On-Site Neurological Assessment for Divers and the Hazardous Marine Life Injuries courses, call your dive center.