The HIRA Programme

For 35 years, DAN Europe's mission is making diving safer. This has been done by offering diving medical assistance and advice, performing research and sharing this knowledge, developing first aid courses and promoting safety campaigns. Now, we take it one step further by launching a global diving safety initiative aimed at dive centres and diving professionals, but to the benefit of all divers.

The diver

When most divers select a dive destination, the choices are made based on what divers wants to see, or what country or region they want to visit. Then, usually, when they choose the hotel, they look at the services offered, how luxurious the hotel is, how comfortable the rooms are, or simply at the number of stars the hotel has, as this is a good and fast identification of what they can expect.

And when they select the dive centre? Sometimes this selection has a limited choice as the hotel might have its own dive centre or collaborates with one. Or the centre is selected based on the price of the dive. Or maybe on the distance from the hotel to the dive centre, or even on the kind of dives offered. But how many divers consider the most important issue when choosing which dive centre to dive with? How many divers consider the safety aspect? Who really thinks about how safe a dive operation is, or wonders how the staff of the dive centre would act in case of emergency? This unfortunately is one of the least important selection criteria, but the reason is not because the diver is not interested in this, but because there is no clear identification or information that actually helps the diver understand this important selection criteria. Therefore, the majority of divers just presume, safety is not an issue (as one should expect) and think that the dive centre has everything covered. Only when they are diving with the centre, the diver might discover that there are actually some safety concerns. But even in this case, when it truly is too late to change your choice, the diver is not evaluating everything needed to determine a dive centre works in a safe way. Probably because the random diver does not have the knowledge and tools to evaluate the level of safety and preparedness in a dive centre, and this should not even be expected from them.

Now imagine that when you book your diving trip, there really is a way of identifying the level of safety and preparedness. Just like we are used to having stars for hotels, stars for restaurants or even stars for wine. A system that can show you that the dive centre you want to dive with has the needed knowledge to make their own dive operation safe and have all that is needed to respond to an emergency.

The dive centres

Dive professionals during their Dive Instructor Course receive the knowledge to safely guide or teach divers. Because experience can't be taught, most dive professionals might start working for a dive centre or school, and, after a while, when they are confident and have more experience, they might even open one. But there is no actual course that teaches them how to run a safe and sustainable business. Yes, a business it is and like all other businesses, the owner has a responsibility to avoid both staff and clients facing unnecessary risks or being injured, while making sure the business remains sustainable. Being an experienced dive Instructor, does not automatically mean you have the same experience to run a dive operation. Dive centre owners might not consider all related risks and / or don't have Emergency Action Plans in place to react to different kind of emergencies.

When referring to risks, we do not only think of the dive, but we also consider fire safety, noise ergonomics, ecological aspects, occupational health and safety, and others. Who actually did a risk

assessment in their dive centre? And if it was done, how is this communicated towards the clients? Should a dive centre that invested time and energy in making its operations safe not show this to the client?

At present dive centres do not have a way of showing their level or preparedness. And whether or not the dive centre reduced the risks to the minimum, the client does not see it, which leads to divers not considering the safety aspect and presuming all dive centres are equal when it comes to safety.

The Hazard Identification & Risk Assessment (HIRA)

DAN's DSP program is based on a Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment. By understanding the risks present in a dive operation it is possible to reduce them to a minimum. By increasing awareness and mitigating risk, we are able to increase diving safety.

Because every dive centre is different and risks vary, there is no single solution and therefore it becomes crucial that the dive centre owner engages himself/herself in an educational project that helps him/her understanding risks. DAN is taking the dive centre owner through this educational pathway, increasing his/her knowledge step by step and helping him/her to meet the needed prerequisites.

Since there are many aspects that needs consideration and to help dive centres to gradually increase safety the DAN DSP programme is divided into 3 levels. For every level there are specific requirements.

For the first or basic level (HIRA I) we require the bare minimum standards of what a diver should expect from a dive centre (or dive professional). Basic first aid material and staff trained to provide first aid is part of these requirements, but they also include the need to have some basic Standard Operating Procedures (such as safety briefings) and Emergency Action Plans (EAPs).

For level 2 (HIRA II), the standard is raised significantly and next to for example more Standard Operating Procedures and Emergency Action Plans, we request an Environmental Sustainability Plan and the use of regular emergency drills. In order to provide safer services to divers and to be able to respond to diving emergencies effectively and rapidly, dive centres (or dive professionals) will need to put the necessary effort in setting up EAPs. This is not an easy task, but surely makes a difference. Therefore, who meets the Level II requirements is putting a lot of effort in making its dive operation safer.

The third level (HIRA III) is where the dive centre distinguishes themselves from the rest. To get there the dive centre will really need to embrace the culture of diving safety. Those participating in HIRA III will be guided through a complete Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment process, but instead of rather just doing a HIRA, we provide the dive centre owner with the tools to actually do it themselves. We educate them to understand the risks present in every aspect of their dive business and provide them with the needed knowledge to mitigate those risks, and to perform ongoing assessments and improvements to keep their dive operation as safe as possible. Since taking into consideration all kinds of safety aspects isn't easy, DAN also provides assistance to dive centres who are facing difficulties in getting to this level of excellence. Through a network of Diving Safety Officer Coordinators, Professionals trained to perform risk assessments and mitigate risks, we are able to actually partner up with dive centres who are willing to make their business safer and provide them with the needed assistance. Alternatively, it is possible for a selected group of experienced dive professionals to get trained as Diving Safety Officers. This way the dive centre can have his own DSO, taking care of the safety in their own dive centre(s).

Distinguishing yourself from the rest and providing the diver with the tools needed to select a dive centre

Going back to the idea that when booking a diving trip, it would be great to have a way of identifying the

level of safety and preparedness when choosing the dive centre, we now actually have all tools needed to make this happen.

Even if several dive organisations already identify different levels of dive centres, based on the services offered or based on prerequisites set by the single dive organisation, thanks to the DSP/HIRA programme it now is possible to take the complete safety aspect into consideration, while making the programme globally available to dive centres from all organisations.

Dive centres or professionals who get to HIRA I, II or III will have the possibility to show this to the diving community by displaying the respective HIRA compliance declaration. This way their efforts will be rewarded, they will be able to differentiate from the others and for the diver it becomes possible to select the dive centre which cares for the safety of divers. Once a centre is HIRA III compliant, they can also request DAN to do an additional risk assessment in their dive centre and receive a written report and HIRA certification from DAN.

Participation in the HIRA program costs nothing but is a way DAN increases diving safety and accomplishes its mission. The only cost is the actual time and effort put into it by the dive centre or pro, in order to get to a level where they also make a difference in diving safety!

Every dive centre or pro which fully embraces the culture of diving safety and strives towards an incident and accident free dive operation can participate in this programme, while the whole diving community will benefit from the results.

As with the Safety Campaigns promoted by DAN, all of this became possible thanks to the DAN membership fees.