



Diving in Remote Areas

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DIVING HAS INHERENT RISKS. The human body was not designed to be underwater, and drowning, decompression illness, barotrauma, hazardous marine life injuries, and preexisting health issues all require an emergency response. Diving in remote areas introduces additional risks, especially access to medical care.

Part of what makes a destination remote is how long it will take to get help if something goes wrong. A three-hour boat ride to an offshore site is already remote in terms of an urgent response to a medical emergency. A three-day sail on a liveboard makes the challenge much more significant.

Some common critical questions that diligent operators, professionals, and divers should ask themselves include the following:

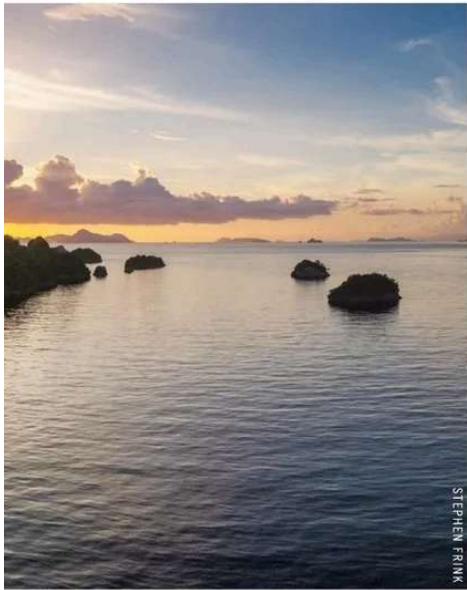
- Where is the nearest health care facility, and can it deal with dive emergencies?
- Is an emergency response service available that can reach us and get an injured diver to the nearest health care facility?
- How long will an evacuation take?
- What medical equipment do we need, and will our emergency oxygen supply last long enough?
- What emergency response training do the people on the boat have?
- How many divers are at the site, and can the available emergency response handle multiple injured divers?

- Can a diver get evacuated to advanced care considering issues such as distance, border crossings, and landing (especially at night)?

The answers to these questions will depend on the location; each place has its own risk factors. Divers, dive operators, dive professionals, and trip leaders should carefully assess a potential destination to determine whether it is safe enough for diving before planning a trip there. If there are concerns about safety, they should consider its unique challenges and determine what preparations are necessary. It is also important to understand that you can't rely on travel or dive accident insurance, insurance hotlines, or even DAN for emergency medical services.

The dive operator is responsible for understanding the risks and having plans in place to take care of their crew and clients. The trip leader represents the divers and needs to make sure that the operator has practical plans. Divers should prepare themselves with important information, such as contact and insurance information and essential safety gear.

The best way to deal with potential accidents or injuries in remote places is by having realistic, practical, and carefully tested emergency action plans in place. These plans and procedures should account for long response times and the best use of internal resources, such as the center of operations and the appointed medical officer.



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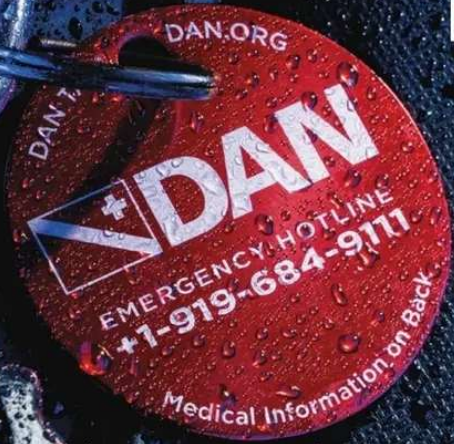
Any plan also must account for the availability of rescue transportation and access to health care and other emergency services.

DAN has handled challenges arising from dive accidents in remote areas since our inception. Our experiences have revealed that emergency planning is typically either nonexistent or too basic to be useful.

Consider the Cocos and Socorro islands, Raja Ampat, Kiribati or even the Marshall Islands. Calls come in for help, local rescue and medical resources are often nonexistent, and divers and dive operators are left feeling frustrated, angry, and perhaps even medically compromised.

One of DAN’s e-learning modules is specifically designed to help dive operators and trip leaders know what questions to ask and offers suggestions on mitigating potential issues. A self-assessment survey pairs with the module to help evaluate a diver’s risk exposure in a potential destination. Divers, dive operators, and dive professionals can implement the applicable suggestions to help reduce the overall level of risk and ensure they feel comfortable handling any remaining potential risks.

While some dive sites may seem too risky, many are manageable with some preparation. You can lower the potential for negative experiences if you consider reasonable precautions and have an emergency action plan. **AD**





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