Safety Topic – Dive Flags

The following information is available on-line and relevant websites are included. The topic of dive flag safety is an interesting one – be careful out there.

**What is required to rent a boat?**
- Renters must be 21 years of age
- Have a valid Credit Card and Government issued photo identification
- Or provide $600 and Government issued photo identification
- Renters must complete the rental boat safety checklist with rental team before departure

**Pleasure Craft Operators Certification (PCOC) is not required for rental agencies.** Instead, a comprehensive boat and safety assessment as outlined by Transport Canada Regulations takes place before you depart on your boat.


**Canadian Power Squadrons**

1.14 **Diver Down Flag**

When your boat is engaged in diving operations, prominently display the internationally recognized “diver flag,” a red flag with a diagonal white stripe. Most state and provincial jurisdictions provide that, when this flag is displayed, divers must stay within a certain radius of the boat (typically 100 feet) and other boats may not intrude into that area. If divers venture beyond that radius, they should take a buoy displaying the diver flag with them. There is no signal for night diving.

Display the diver down flag only when divers are in the water. Do not fly it routinely as the hallmark of a dive boat.

1.14 **Restricted in ability to maneuver due to diving**

Whenever a vessel is restricted in her ability to maneuver due to underwater operations, such as diving, internationally recognized Navigation Rules provide that she may display International Code flag A (Alpha), a swallow tailed flag with the half nearest the hoist white and the outer half blue. The vessel thereby gains a special privilege under the Rules and may not be impeded by ordinary vessels not entitled to a higher class of privilege. This flag is only for vessels and is not carried on buoys, as is the Diver Down flag. At night, three vertically arranged, all-round lights red over white over red invoke the same privilege as the flag.


Transport Canada Marine Safety
Keep Your Distance from Divers Below the Surface
Diving is a popular water sport so know what a diver down flag looks like and keep careful watch for such flags. This is very important because the wake from your boat, along with weather and other factors, can make it hard to see divers' bubbles on the surface of the water.

Divers’ boats must display the international blue and white Code Flag Alpha. A red and white flag that may also be carried on a buoy marks the area where diving is in progress, although divers may stray from the boundaries of the marked areas. If you decide to go diving from your boat, remember to display these flags as well. Best practice includes staying within 100 m (328') of your flag.

Boaters
When you see either flag, give divers plenty of room by keeping your boat at least 100 m (328') from the flag. If you can't stay that far away because of the size of the waterway, slow down as much as possible, move ahead with caution, and keep clear of the vessel and diving site.


Interesting articles:
This is an extract from an article by By Wayne K. Roustan, Sun Sentinel (Florida)
Divers demand crackdown on boaters who get too close

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission statistics reflect it's a low priority

FWC Lt. Dave Bingham, who spearheads dive-flag enforcement for Broward County, said FWC takes an active role in preventing dive-flag violations.
"We gear up every year," he said. "We call it Operation Wave the Flag because we're trying to promote dive safety." This year it's not yet scheduled, he said.
The first day, officers use a laser to measure distances between boats and dive flags, then ticket those who veer too close. On the second day, officers focus on divers who use their flags improperly or stray too far from them.
In an experiment about two years ago, Bingham displayed a dive flag on a marked FWC boat and found that other boats still came within 176 feet of the patrol boat.
"Even a law enforcement boat with a dive flag on the top of it, properly displayed, and it didn't matter," he said. "We wrote just as many tickets with a dive flag on a patrol boat as we did on [an unmarked] boat."
In many cases, Bingham said, other dive boats are to blame for dangerous dive-flag violations.
"A large percentage of violators are divers themselves. Isn't that ironic? Isn't that strange?" Bingham asked. "You'd think that divers would know better. They wouldn't want it to happen to them. It's astonishing really."
Dive Flag Becomes a Personal Watercraft Slalom Course!

by James W. Grier, Ph.D.

I am a zoologist with a broad interest in animal life, including aquatic types. During my frequent travels, I like to explore local habitats by scuba diving.

Although diving alone did not contribute to this particular incident, I was diving alone. I am fully aware of and respect the buddy system and I do not recommend or encourage others to dive alone. I believe I know my limitations and, to me, safety, common sense and taking full responsibility for one's actions are paramount. There are several conditions under which I will not dive alone. But there are other situations in which I am comfortable, confident and able to dive on my own and frequently do so.

To return to my story, I was attending meetings in a western state and decided to do some local diving. After one of the days' sessions, I rented gear from a dive shop and headed out to a reservoir behind a large dam in the hills. I picked out a couple sites and started my first of two planned dives, dive flag in tow on the surface. It was a beautiful late afternoon with no boats in sight and the beach was isolated except for a family some distance up the shore.

The visibility was much worse than I had hoped for or been led to expect. But I am used to reduced expectations in diving; it was okay and I was navigating by compass. I had gone down to 40 feet in a large shallow and flat bay, turned around and was headed back to shore. When I was at a depth of about 30 feet I heard personal watercrafts, loud and probably overhead. Through the tension in the line, I could feel my dive flag bobbing in the waves.

I frequently experience speed boats overhead ignoring dive flags. I had heard second hand about a diver who had tied his dive flag line to his BC and was hauled rapidly to the surface by someone who had pulled his flag and line out of the water! I have never tied myself to my flag line although I used to loop it to my upper arm to leave my hands free. Out of caution, however, I had started carrying the end of the line in my hand so I could release it if necessary; fortunately, I was doing so during this dive.

The next thing I felt was a sudden and heavy jerk on my line. I gave a strong tug back. I was not pulled up but there were several more pulls on my line. Then the float went back to bobbing in the continued wave action, accompanied by continuing motor noise overhead. I was not pleased with the situation.

I slowly worked my way in toward shore by compass, stayed deep and let out the full length of line to get as far away from the action as possible. Moving and listening carefully and watching all around overhead, I got into the shallows, surfaced and looked at what was going on. Only the float and stick remained, the flag was gone. A guy I estimated to be in his 20s to 30s was jetting around the float in loops and figure eights like a cat playing with a mouse! A friend of his on another personal watercraft was nearby but had gone ashore.

I tried to find the registration numbers on their watercraft so I could report them but could not see the numbers. I yelled to get their attention and I let them know in no uncertain terms what they were doing and what I thought about it!

When the guy who was at my flag first saw me, he stopped, his mouth dropped open in
surprise and he asked me where I had come from. I told him I was at the other end of the line
he was messing with and he was seriously violating the law. Although diving and the dive flag
symbol are publicized in the area, including the boating regulations, and the reservoir is
regularly patrolled by a sheriff, these two knew nothing about diving or dive flags. They were
surprised to learn that a person could go under water for extended periods and asked how
long I had been down.

They said they had been attracted to the red flag from a distance and thought it was
something lost by a boater. When they saw it was connected to a line, they thought it was
marking an illegal fish trap or something. Then, when they tried to pull it up and it pulled back,
they said they thought the Loch Ness monster or a really big fish was on the other end!

I asked about the red flag and they said they did not know what happened to it, that it must
have washed off. (I thought to myself, Yeah, sure!) Later, after I took my line and remaining
float back to the car, they threw the flag on the beach toward the car and left.

This incident reinforced two things I already knew but about which we must be constantly on
the alert: (1) one cannot assume all boaters will respect or even know about and understand
dive flags and our activities beneath the surface; and (2) the line to the dive flag should be
carried by hand, not tied to equipment or otherwise connected to one’s body, in case it needs
to be released. In short, one must always be alert to overhead conditions and not trust others
on the surface regardless of the presence of a dive flag and regulations pertaining to it.