Safety Activity Checkpoint

Scuba
HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required

Council Approval: Required
Activity Permitted For: C S A (12 years and older)

About Scuba
Scuba diving is an eye-opening opportunity to experience the underwater world of sea life. Scuba is an acronym for “self-contained underwater breathing apparatus” and requires specialized equipment, most of which certified scuba-diving schools rent for lessons. Scuba diving can be done throughout the country in a variety of locations, including oceans, lakes, and rivers. Divers can progress from exploratory experiences in pools, to various certification training courses, and finally to recreational dives.

Organizations such as the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) and the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) offer online tools to locate certified scuba instructors. Scuba diving is a challenging activity, and girls who wish to learn to scuba dive must be at least 12 years old and meet the age and health requirements set by the certifying agency.

Learn More:
- Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI): PADI
- Scuba Schools International (SSI): Dive SSI
- National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI): NAUI
- World Recreational Scuba Training Council: WRSTC
- Project Aware: Project Aware
- Diver’s Alert Network (DAN): Diver’s Alert Network
- World’s best dives for kids and teens: Sport Diver
- Family-friendly scuba dives: The Active Times
**Pool-Only Scuba Experience Programs**

Most dive agencies offer non-certification scuba experience programs for beginner participants of varying ages. This is a great way to explore the sport before “diving in.” Follow dive agency standards for age, health, supervision, and maximum depth requirements. Girl Scout adult-to-girl ratios must be maintained.

A Girl Scout swim test is required prior to participating in a scuba experience program. Parents/Guardians should be consulted prior to swimming event to verify girls’ abilities. The scuba instructor may have final word in determining a girl’s abilities based on the skills needed. The swim test can be found here: [Swim Test](#).

**Include Girls with Disabilities**

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers, and ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the location in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities, and check out the [Handicapped SCUBA Association](#) and more information on [adaptive scuba programs](#).

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**Ensure participants are able to participate in scuba activities.** Each person must complete the [World Recreational Scuba Training Council (WRSTC) medical form](#), including a doctor’s signature stating the student is fit for diving prior to enrollment.

**Ensure participants are able to swim and are comfortable in the water.** Scuba requires a high degree of ability and comfort in the water, called “watermanship.” Dive training organization watermanship evaluations vary, but typically include demonstration of ability to swim a minimum of 200 yards, tread water for 15 minutes, or swim 500 yards with mask, fins, and snorkel—or some combination. Consult the instructor.

Ensure participants also have an understanding of the body of water they are going to dive in and aware of the type of marine life they may come across.

**Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Ensure that the scuba-diving teacher holds instructional certification from Scuba Schools International (SSI), PADI, the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI), or other industry-recognized dive training organization. Verify that the certifying agency has guidelines for working with youth.

**Maintain appropriate ratios.** These ratios must be followed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>Instructor to student ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pool training activities</td>
<td>1:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confined water training activities</td>
<td>1:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open water training dive</td>
<td>1:4; 2 students may be added with additional instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open water certification</td>
<td>1:4 instructor with a certified assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These ratios are considered maximum and should be reduced if environmental conditions or other factors are not optimal.*

To maintain general supervision of the girls, non-diving volunteers may be able to supervise pool or confined-water activities by watching from the pool deck or surface. For open water training dives, non-divers may supervise from land or boat. Among the student divers, instructors, and watchers, there must always be two
unrelated adults, one of whom is female, who are approved by GSNorCal.

**Select a safe diving site.** Make sure your instructor is familiar with the scuba site. Scuba trips to unknown or non-designated areas are not allowed.

**Size up scuba gear.** Communicate girls’ ages, heights, and weights to instructors and equipment providers to ensure the appropriate size of scuba gear is available. Be sure that the instructor and participants check equipment before use. See gear list below.

**Use the buddy system.** All divers must use the buddy system above and under the water. *Solo diving is prohibited within Girl Scout programs.*

**Safeguard valuables.** Do not leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place. If working with a scuba-diving school or camp, inquire about the organization’s storage amenities.

**Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in first aid, including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of near-drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with wilderness first aid. See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.

**Get a weather and wind report.** Never scuba dive on a stormy or extremely windy day. Check weather.com or other reliable weather source to determine if conditions are appropriate. Know how to respond if weather conditions change quickly.

Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning. Exit water immediately, and take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open, flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them. If on a boat, follow the instructions of the boat captain.

**Recreational Diving.** After becoming certified divers, Girl Scouts may continue with recreational (non-training) dives, based on certification levels. A dive professional is required to provide expert supervision.

- Follow dive agency standards which will give guidelines on what progressive experiences are possible. Most agencies have Junior Diver standards; adhere to requirements to dive with an adult, parent, or professional.

- Pre-entry level certification/supervised diver courses (such as PADI Scuba Diver) requirements for maximum depth and supervision must be met. Verify that all participants are certified by a reputable dive agency. All divers (Girl Scouts and adults) must provide proof of diving experience within 6 months of the dive, or take remedial instruction.

- The ratio for recreational diving is 1:8 professional-to-diver.

- Solo diving in Girl Scouts is prohibited; all divers must dive with a buddy.

- Full penetration diving of wrecks and overhead environments are prohibited by recreational divers in a Girl Scout program.

- Rebreathers or any gases/blends except air and up to 36% enriched air are prohibited. Only those certified to use enriched air blends may do so.
Scuba-Diving Gear

Required Gear for all Dive Activities
- Fins, mask, snorkel, and boots (if conditions warrant)
- Compressed gas cylinder and valve
- Bouyancy control device (BCD) with tank mount or separate backpack, and low-pressure inflator
- Primary regulator and alternate air source
- Breathing gas monitoring device/Submersible Pressure Gauge (SPG)
- Depth monitoring device
- Time monitoring device
- Quick-release weight system and weights (if necessary for neutral buoyancy)
- Adequate exposure protection for local dive conditions
- Emergency oxygen kit and waterproof first aid kit (1 per group)

Additional Required Gear for Open Water Dives
- When divers are riding or waiting on boat, each wears a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket (Type III recommended) that fits according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears.
- At least one graspable and Coast-Guard approved personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) should be immediately available for each group on the water.
- Compass.
- Dive tables or dive computer.
- Audible emergency surface signaling device.
- Personal surface marker buoy.
- Floating dive flag (1 per group or as dictated by local regulations).
- Dive tool/knife (certified divers) unless prohibited by local regulations.
- Lights, slate and pencil, drift buoy, or other gear, as conditions require.

Recommended Gear
- Mask defogger solution
- Swimsuit with rash guard and swim tights, or dive skin
- Waterproof, coral-safe sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Beach towel
- Dry clothing for after the dive

Girl Scouts of Northern California’s Approval Process for Scuba
Scuba is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form: Submit the online Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
  - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California and have a current background check. Troop Leaders can find this information in their Volunteer Toolkit.
  - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
  - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your Volunteer Learning Portal in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
    - For example, the Camp Out course is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-
GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.

- The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
- The **Backpacking course** is required before you take girls on an overnight backpacking adventure.

**High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops/groups must select a high-adventure vendor from the [High-Adventure Approved Vendor List](#), which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the council's and volunteer's legal interests.