

Ocean Guardian Dive Club



Photo: Nautilus Aquatics

The Next Generation of Divers

According to the Dive Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) Fast Facts (2015), the average diver traveling to a dive resort is 41 years old and 42% of divers traveling to resorts have children under 17. This creates a unique opportunity to reach the next generation of divers, while simultaneously creating a life-long connection with national marine sanctuaries and the special places they protect.

The Ocean Guardian Dive Club seeks to benefit dive shops by increasing their reach to younger generations of divers through access to a science-focused marine conservation curriculum. This club also provides dive shops with a method of distinguishing themselves as leaders in the field for eco-tourism. Children who are taught to be responsible divers at a young age will take those values with them as they grow into adult divers – leading to a connection with the ocean that fosters a desire to protect it and a lifetime of participation in this recreational activity.

What is the Ocean Guardian Dive Club?

The Ocean Guardian Dive Club will be a nationally recognized youth dive program designed to strengthen youth involvement in diving and ocean conservation. It will introduce elementary and middle school students to the National Marine Sanctuary System using scuba diving to create a valuable hands-on learning experience. The program will follow dive industry standards as well as contain specific national marine sanctuary and ocean conservation learning points, and students will emerge with certificates from recognized dive industry training organizations.

Why the Ocean Guardian Dive Club?

In their 2014 annual report, DEMA lists one of their main goals as helping to “promote sustained growth in recreational diving” (13). Dive shops running the Ocean Guardian Dive Club will be given curriculum for connecting with the next generation of divers while distinguishing themselves as leaders in youth based eco-tourism activities. Participating in the Ocean Guardian Dive Club will help shops to gain increased visibility within their community. Participating dive shops will receive:

- Access to an online training program for staff
- Direct support from the Ocean Guardian Dive Club program manager
- Program materials
- Use of Ocean Guardian Dive Club logo

Diving will become a vehicle for students to develop a close personal connection with the ocean, which will lead to a better appreciation for national marine sanctuaries. The program will educate students about important marine conservation issues, such as marine debris, coral reef etiquette, maritime heritage and ocean acidification. It seeks to **create ocean stewards who promote action for conservation in their communities and make choices that are actively tied to protecting the ocean.**

How does it work?

The Ocean Guardian Dive Club is designed for students from 8 to 12 years of age with the potential to expand to wider audiences after being piloted. Participating dive shops will have access to a curriculum developed by staff at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that focuses on place-based marine science



Students learn about Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary while conducting a mock marine debris clean-up dive.

Photo: Lynnhaven Dive Center

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topics that are tied to protecting our national marine sanctuaries. The curriculum includes two components: (1) knowledge development and (2) in-water diving activities. Both components will focus on teaching and developing strong science-based diving skills while simultaneously teaching about national marine sanctuaries and marine conservation issues.

Dive shops who receive the Ocean Guardian Dive Club certification will also host at least one ocean stewardship project per year (beach clean-up, water quality testing, etc.) and invite youth in the community to participate. They will collect and report data relating to the impacts that their project has on the larger ocean. They will be required to conduct an evaluation of each program as they run it as well as participate in a yearly overall evaluation process.

What are the anticipated outcomes?

The goal of this project is to create a strong connection between recreation and education in young divers, while teaching about the importance of national marine sanctuaries, the challenges they face, and what can be done to protect them. The target audiences for the program will be the students, their families and the dive shops.

Student Outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate responsible diving techniques.
- Students will demonstrate an interest in further development of diving skills through continuing education.
- Students will demonstrate increased knowledge of national marine sanctuaries.
- Students will demonstrate steps they can take to reduce impact on national marine sanctuaries and the marine environment.
- Students will demonstrate increased knowledge of ocean conservation issues.

Dive Shop Outcomes:

- Dive shops will see an increase in enrollment for youth dive programs.
- Dive shops will be recognized as leaders in eco-tourism within their community.
- Dive shop employees will demonstrate increased knowledge of national marine sanctuaries.
- Dive shop employees will demonstrate increased knowledge of ocean conservation issues and how they are impacting sanctuaries.

The initial investments will focus on creating the dive curriculum and piloting the program with specific dive shops. Once the program

has been tested and evaluated it can easily be expanded to more dive shops.

What is the timeline?

The projected timeline is as follows:

Year 1:

- Write curriculum and dive program.
- Promote within the dive community.

Year 2:

- Train shops to deliver Ocean Guardian Dive Club program.
- Run pilot program at selected dive shops.
- Complete end of year Ocean Guardian Dive Club evaluation.
- Create and release outcomes report.

Year 3:

- Make needed changes to program based on end of year evaluation, as well as formative and summative evaluations.
- Expand to key dive shop locations in target areas.
- Conduct yearly evaluations of Ocean Guardian Dive Club program and make changes as necessary.

Year 4:

- Evaluate potential for program expansion to include wider age groups and varying dive certification levels.