

FWC Division of Law Enforcement Interim Policy Memorandum IPM 09-05

July 1, 2009

TO: All Division members

FROM: Colonel Julie Jones
Director, Division of Law Enforcement

SUBJECT: Snorkeling/Skin Diving Policy

This Interim Policy Memorandum (IPM) establishes the Division of Law Enforcement's policies and procedures on Snorkeling/Skin Diving. Upon successful evaluation of the policies and procedures contained in this IPM, the Division may issue a General Order governing Snorkeling/Skin Diving or incorporate this IPM into an existing General Order.

Section 1 (Policy)

- A** The FWC Division of Law Enforcement recognizes that occasionally it is necessary to engage in snorkeling/skin diving for the purpose of evidence recovery, damage assessment, surveillance, and rescue. This IPM establishes procedures on snorkeling/skin diving to ensure member safety.
- B** For the purposes of this IPM only, the term skin diving will also include snorkeling.
- C** Nothing in this IPM shall preclude a member from entering the water to perform a rescue if the demands of the rescue are within the member's abilities.

D Definitions

- (1) Snorkeling** – Swimming at the surface of the water with a mask and with or without a snorkel.
- (2) Skin diving/free diving** – Swimming at or below the surface of the water with a mask and with or without a snorkel.
- (3) Regional Dive Supervisor** – A member appointed by the Regional Commander as being qualified to instruct and oversee regional skin diving operations. The Regional Diver Supervisor should at a minimum possess a valid certification as an Advanced Open Water Scuba Diver.

Section 2 (Responsibilities)

- A** Prior to engaging in snorkeling or skin diving, members shall complete the Division's Snorkeling/Skin Diving Course conducted by the Regional Dive Supervisor or an equally qualified designee. The course consists of a lecture and exam followed by swimming pool skills to determine the member's ability to skin dive safely.
 - (1)** A scuba diver certification from a recognized diving organization may be substituted for the Division's Snorkeling/Skin Diving Course.

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B When snorkeling/skin diving, members shall not:

- (1) Free dive (descend) beyond 30 feet regardless of the water depth.
- (2) Snorkel in water when the visibility is less than 3feet.
- (3) Snorkel in high vessel traffic areas without appropriate law enforcement vessels present for safety.
- (4) Snorkel in areas with underwater hazards such as intakes, thick aquatic plants and spillways.
- (5) Snorkel in other hazardous environmental conditions such as heavy seas or lightening storms.
- (6) Snorkel without a lookout on scene.

Section 3 (Procedures)

- A** Prior to entering the water, the member shall notify the Regional Communications Center of their exact location, including the GPS coordinates, and the reason for entering the water.
- B** Prior to entering the water, the member will ensure their weapons are secure and locked in a vessel compartment.
- C** Member(s) skin diving must wear an approved snorkel vest with emergency CO₂ activation, and display a dive flag from their vessel and/or have a dive flag in tow.
- D** Any time a member enters the water, another member shall be present to serve as a lookout or snorkel buddy.
- (1) When suspects are present, the lookout shall remain aboard the patrol vessel or another patrol vessel to serve as an observer at all times.
- E** The patrol vessel shall be properly anchored prior to any member entering the water.
- (1) If necessary for safety reasons, a patrol vessel may be operated by another member.
 - (2) If a vessel is in operation while a member is in the water, the engine/engines shall be in NEUTRAL whenever the skin diver is below the surface, and the engine/engines shall not be put into gear until the operator has received the OK signal from the member at the surface.
 - (3) The vessel engine/engines shall be turned off anytime a member is in the water at the stern of a vessel.
- F** Division vessels used for skin diving shall be equipped or designed so that members can safely re-board the vessel.
- G** All Members shall notify the Regional Communications Center upon exiting the water.
- H** When a member has a need to enter the water and the prevailing conditions are beyond the scope of this IPM, the member shall contact an in-service supervisor to request authorization before entering the water to skin dive.

JJ/asg