



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CAVE DIVING

## 2007 - FIRST QUARTER SAFETY REPORT



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The 2007 New Year has inspired me to take a good look at how our safety branch functions, where our strengths and weaknesses lie, and how positive steps can be taken to improve the safety of our caves. During the first quarter of 2007, we have mourned the loss of five members of the diving community who perished in the underwater caves and caverns of North America. Of these five, two are suspected of dying from “natural” causes, two from lack of training, and one from unknown complications during a cave dive. The deaths that concern me the most are those that occurred due to lack of training. So what can we do?

If we examine the rules of accident analysis, we quickly discover that lack of training is the number one reason divers die in caves. The question becomes: Are people unaware of the dangers associated with entering underwater caves and caverns without proper training or are they aware of the risks and choose to proceed anyway?” I believe the answer to this question is a little of each. From delving into the details surrounding each incident, and personal encounters I have had with divers while myself cave diving, it would seem most divers are aware that cavern and cave courses exist and are aware that an elevated risk is present during these activities, however the level of risk seems to be grossly underestimated.

I will give an example of what I am speaking about. I was conducting a dive during a full cave course at Orange Grove, located in Peacock Springs State Park, a couple of months ago. Myself, two students, and my wife began our dive by placing a primary tie-off in open water, making our secondary tie-off just inside the cavern, and finally securing our reel to the permanent guideline about 100 feet into the cave. Our dive proceeded uneventfully until our turnaround point at approximately 900 feet into the cave. As we turned, the lead diver, formally the diver in the rear, saw a pair of split fins flutter kicking as quickly as possible towards the exit. We were now left in extremely limited visibility due to the lack of technique displayed by whoever owned that pair of split fins. We continued through 900 feet of nearly zero visibility to the cave exit. After we finished our safety stop, we immediately ascended to see if we could find the diver(s) responsible for the silt out. There were only three other divers present when we surfaced. These divers were wearing single tanks with no H or Y valve, one small light each, and no reels. I asked these divers if they had been in the cave. I was told they had only been in the cavern and had not passed the stop sign, which by the way, is beyond the natural light zone in this cave. Nothing more was said by me until we reached the parking lot. When we arrived back at our vehicles, it became apparent to me that these three divers were the only divers that had just exited the water. I confronted these divers and told them that I knew they had been in the cave, and they confessed that they had followed us in. I told them that I was not trying to chew them out, but explained the dangers of what they had just done in hopes they would not undertake this type of

activity again without proper training. I was informed that they were going to be participating in a cave class in the near future, so I let it go at that, but asked that they wait to cave dive again until they received their training.

I am sure that those of you reading this can think of similar situations you have encountered while cave diving. No one likes to be the “bad guy” or the “scuba police,” but as trained cave divers, this needs to be our role. I believe our cave and cavern training puts us one step ahead of others who have not been formally trained and it places a certain amount of responsibility on our shoulders. I believe as good Samaritans, it is our place to try to educate the diving public about the risks of undertaking these activities and to do our best to discourage those foolish enough to undertake these activities without proper training.

Having said this, what can the NACD do? There are two major things I would like to see accomplished during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2007. First, I am attempting to compile a list of all of the divable caves in the world. This is an impossible task for me to undertake alone. I will need the help of our safety officers and cave and cavern divers from around the world. As this list develops, I would like to see every cave on our list represented by an active safety officer. We need additional volunteers for almost every region in the world to make this possible. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact me at [safety@safecavediving.com](mailto:safety@safecavediving.com), or you may reach me by phone at (612) 508-4469. My second goal for this quarter is the development of new electronic safety literature such as DVDs, a section for our website, and an email that diving agencies can send to their divers and instructors. If you are able and willing to help in the development of these items, I would again ask that you contact me.

I am looking forward to the rest of 2007 and I hope to see some new faces involved as well as those who are currently involved with making our caves a safe place for others to enjoy.