

Welcome to dive for science in France! (2025)

Legal status of scientific diving

There is a professional certification for “diving scientists” [Certificat d’Aptitude à l’Hyperbarie - CAH, mention B] defined by law [Decreets n° 2011-45 ETST1023798D of January 11th, 2011 and n° 2020-1531 MTRT1931550D of December 7th, 2020]. For foreign scientists who don’t have a CAH, it is necessary to hold a professional scientific diver (SD) certificate issued by a relevant national SD authority and a written authorization of their employer. Certificates that comply with the ESD and AESD standards are generally accepted, but a checkout dive is a common practice for new members joining an occupational SD team.

Medical examinations

Medical examinations obtained in other countries apply also in France, as long as they comply with the local level of scrutiny. The examinations for professional diving are generally valid for 12 months, but in special cases, hyperbaric physicians may extend the validity up to 4 years (e.g. blood, spirometry, hearing, ECG). The validity period must cover all of the planned days/weeks/months of dive.

Insurance

As an employee occupying a scientific position in a French laboratory, you are covered by a statutory accident insurance throughout the duration of your contract. In all other cases, a SD must be covered by insurance that does not exclude the risks associated with professional diving. Do not forget to remind your employer to declare your work profile to the insurance company to avoid any penalty fees. In all other cases, SD must take out a specific accident insurance covering the risks of professional diving.

Decompression issues

The choice of the decompression method depends on the diving techniques to be used; it is up to team leader to decide, based on a risk assessment. In France, the reference decompression tables are those annexed to the order n° MTRT1901236A of May 14th, 2019 (Journal Officiel of May 24th, 2019) relating to hyperbaric work in underwater environments (mention A). However, diving computers embedding an algorithm that complies with the reference tables may be used, subject to acceptance by the French employer.

First Aid

All divers must have a valid first aid (CPR) qualification to treat diving casualties. Dive mission leaders must have an advanced level qualification. All SD team members must also be trained in all available first-aid equipment, including the administration of oxygen to victims of diving accidents.

Scientific Diving Procedures

General SD procedures are defined by Order n° MTRT1901237A of May 14th, 2019 relating to hyperbaric interventions performed with immersion within the framework of the mention B “techniques, sciences, fishing, aquaculture, media and other interventions”. Instructions on procedures and rules for underwater archaeology are detailed in the Order n° MCCC1610914A of April 21st, 2016 (ministry of culture). Collection Permits: in France, collecting samples by diving require prior authorization delivered by governmental competent authorities (Maritime Affairs). In all cases, scientific diving visitors are invited to seek advice from the local diving officer. All their dives will be carried out under the responsibility of a hyperbaric operations manager who will ensure that the rules are properly applied.

Breathing gas

Air diving limit for SD depends on the risk assessment and the divers' qualification. The French SD certificates allow diving down to 50 meters with air; however, mixed gases can be used at any depth and must be used for depth greater than 50 m. Mixed gases or pure oxygen may be used depending on specific qualifications and risk assessment.

Volunteers

Non-SD certified volunteers are currently not accepted.

An exception is made for the use of volunteers on an archaeological site. DRASSM can grant temporary authorisation.

More information

The coordinating body for French SD is the CNPS (Comité National de la Plongée Scientifique). For any further questions concerning SD in France, please contact us.

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You can also contact:

- Jean-Pierre Féral: jpferal@gmail.com (Chairman of the ESDP - European Scientific Diving Panel): <https://www.esdpanel.eu/>
- Sébastien Legrand: sebastien.legrand@culture.gouv.fr (hyperbaric control - DRASSM, <http://archeologie.culture.fr/fr/drassm147http://archeologie.culture.fr/fr/drassm>)

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