

**EFFECTIVE**  
**1 December 2005**



**MINIMUM COURSE CONTENT**  
**FOR**  
**Common Hand Signals for Scuba Diving**

As Approved By

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# **Recreational Scuba Training Council (RSTC)**

## **Common Hand Signals for Recreational Scuba Diving**

### **Scope and Purpose**

To formally standardize the most common hand signals used during recreational scuba diving.

Effective underwater communication is necessary for the safe and efficient conduct of any recreational or training-related scuba dive. The most convenient and reliable method of communication between divers is through the use of simple hand signals.

Where possible, hand signals should be derived from those with similar meanings on land, to reduce learning effort and time. This also makes these signals easier to understand by divers who have been trained by different organizations, speak different languages, or come from different countries.

Effective underwater communication is necessary for the safe and efficient conduct of any recreational or training-related scuba dive. While many mechanical or electronic underwater communications devices are available, in the majority of situations, the most reliable method of communication between divers is through the use of simple hand signals.

Divers exchange hand signals to give each other instructions, provide information on the dive, and indicate their condition. The signals employed by divers to increase the efficiency of their dives are natural signals, local signals and those created for special circumstances.

Natural signals are those whose meaning is obvious in any language, such as shrugging the shoulders for “I don’t know,” nodding the head for “Yes,” shaking the head for “no” or pointing to a gauge to mean “What does it read?”

Local signals are those applicable to a specific area, such as a cupped hand for “abalone” and thumb and first two fingers opening and closing for “moray eel.”

Special signals are those created for circumstances such as instruction, for example, two index fingers alongside each other for “get with your buddy,” or hand flat with palm down for “level off.” The signals found in this document fall under this category.

The signals are hand motions instead of finger motions, making them easy to perform by divers both wearing and not wearing mittens. Where possible, the signals were derived from those with similar meanings on land, to reduce learning effort and time. Signal systems using methods other than hand signals, were not included in this standard because of their limited use by sport divers.

Regardless of the experience and knowledge of the divers involved, it is always prudent to review hand signals and their meanings prior to each dive so that no confusion occurs during the dive.

Many commonly used signals pose a question such as “Are you OK?” and these require the other diver to return the same signal to indicate an affirmative response or an alternate signal if a problem exists. When using hand signals, divers should employ deliberate, clear movements, pausing if necessary between signals to ensure comprehension by their dive buddy.

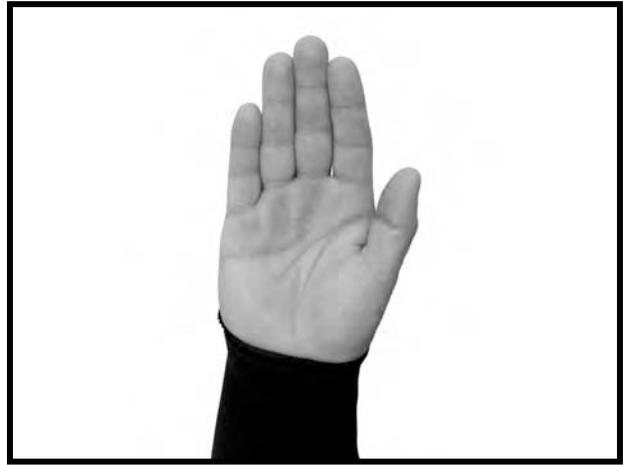
## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Stop

Raise hand vertically, fingers together, palm facing the receiver.

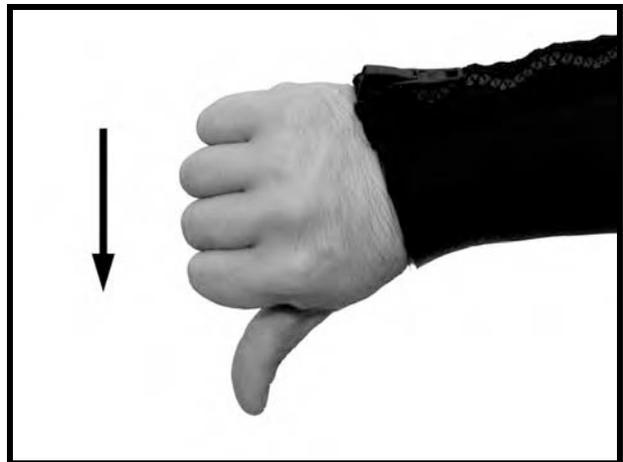
May be followed by another signal indicating reason for stopping.



### Go down or I'm going down.

Make a fist with one hand, thumb extended downward.

Downward movement of the hand indicates direction of travel.



### Go up or I'm going up.

Make a fist with one hand, thumb extended upward.

Upward movement of the hand indicates direction of travel.

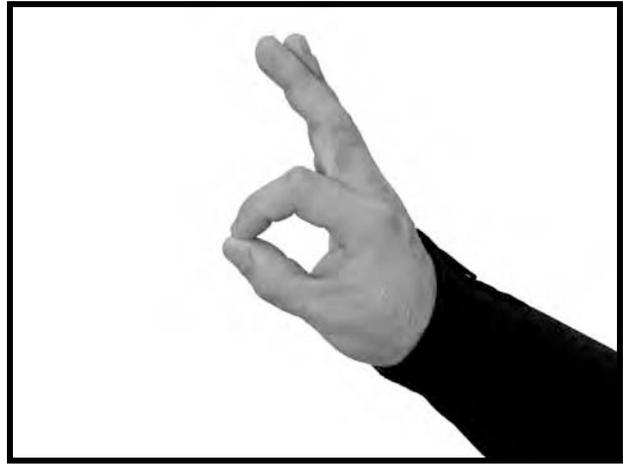


## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Are you OK? or OK!

With thumb and forefinger make a circle, extending three remaining fingers if possible.



### Are you OK? or OK! (wearing gloves or mittens).

With thumb and forefinger make a circle, extending the three remaining fingers if possible.

Divers wearing mittens or thick gloves may not be able to extend the three remaining fingers. In these circumstances use method shown here.



### Are you OK? or OK! (on the surface at a distance)

Extend both arms overhead with fingertips touching above head to make a large "O" shape.



## Common Diving Hand Signals

### Are you OK? or OK! (on the surface, one hand occupied)

Extend one arm overhead with fingertips touching top of head to make a large "O" shape.

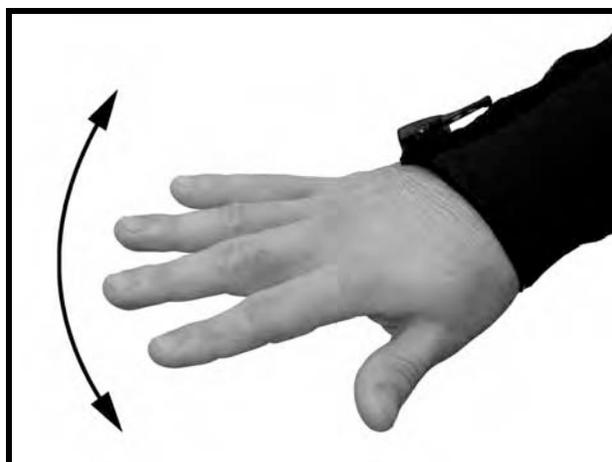
This method may be used if one of the diver's hands is occupied.



### Something is wrong.

With hand flat, palm down, fingers apart, thumb sticking out, rock hand back and forth on the axis of the forearm.

May be followed by another signal indicating source of problem.



### Distress or help me

Wave hand quickly from a horizontal position to a position overhead.

When in the horizontal position, hand may strike the water's surface.



## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### I'm low on air.

Make a clenched fist with one hand and move hand inward toward the chest.

Motion may be repeated several times to indicate urgency.



### I'm out of air.

With hand flat, fingers together, palm down, draw hand across the throat in a cutting motion.

Motion may be repeated several times to indicate urgency.



### Let's share air.

Using the fingers of the left hand, point towards the regulator or remove the regulator and point to the mouth.

Motion may be repeated several times to indicate urgency.



## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Danger

Make a clenched fist with one hand and extend arm in the direction of danger.



### Danger

Clench both fists and cross arms in front of the body.

May be followed by pointing at the source of danger.



### Come here.

Sweep hand toward the body in a beckoning motion.



## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Watch or look

Place the tips of the forefinger and middle finger against the mask lens.

May be followed by another signal indicating direction in which to look or the person to watch.



### Me or I

Point to yourself at chest height.



### Under, over or around

With palm down, use hand motion to indicate intended route to go under, over or around an underwater formation.

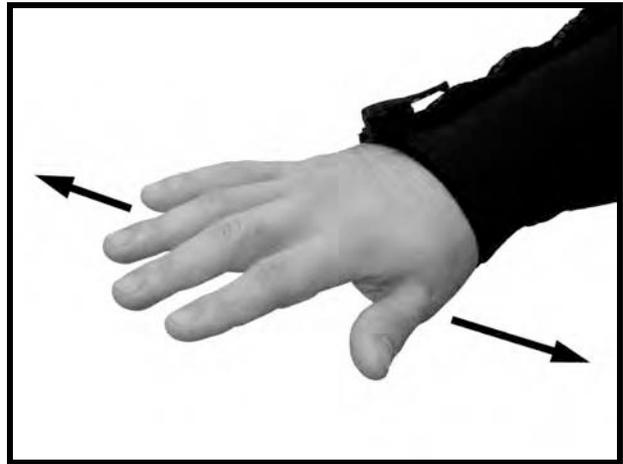


## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Level off at this depth.

With hand flat, palm down, fingers apart and thumb sticking out, move hand slowly back and forth horizontally.



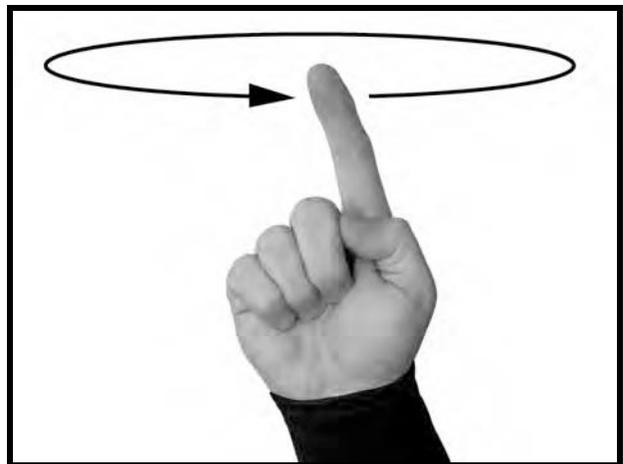
### Go that way.

Make a fist with one hand, thumb extended and pointing in the direction that you wish to swim.



### Turn around.

Extend the forefinger of one hand vertically and rotate the hand in a circular movement.

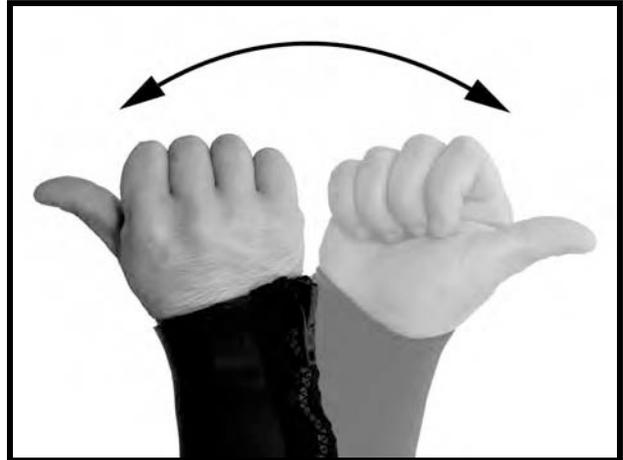


## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Which direction?

Make a fist with one hand, thumb extended, and rotate the hand through 180 degrees several times to indicate confusion regarding the intended direction of travel.



### Ear(s) not clearing

Point to one ear with forefinger.



### I am cold.

Cross arms in front of chest, grab upper arms with opposite hands to indicate chilling.

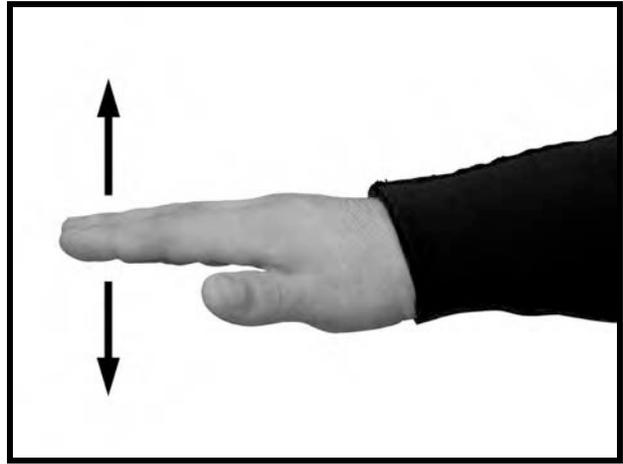


## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Take it easy or slow down.

With hand flat, palm down, slowly flex hand up and down repeatedly.



### Hold hands.

Clasp both hands together.



### Get with your buddy.

Make fists with both hands, forefingers extended, and bring hands together.



## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Who will lead, who will follow.

Point at the diver who will lead and position that hand in front of the body. Point to the diver who will follow and then position that hand behind the other, indicating direction with both forefingers.



### Think or remember

Touch forehead with forefinger.



### I don't know.

Position hands out to each side of the body with palms facing up and shrug shoulders to indicate confusion.



## Common Diving Hand Signals

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### Boat

Cup hands together.



**For more information, contact:**

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# Appendix A

## RSTC Members

### IDEA

International Diving Educators Association  
P.O. Box 8427  
Jacksonville, FL 32239 USA  
1-904-744-5554 Fax: 1-904-743-5425  
Email: info@ideascuba.com

### PADI

Professional Association of Diving Instructors  
30151 Tomas Street  
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688-2125 USA  
1-949-858-7234 Fax: 1-949-267-1266  
Email: Julie.taylor.sanders@padi.com or jeff.nadler@padi.com

### PDIC

Professional Diving Instructors Corporation  
1015 River Street  
Scranton, PA 18505 USA  
1-570-342-9434 Fax: 1-570-342-6030  
Email: info@pdic-intl.com

### SDI

Scuba Diving International  
18 Elm Street  
Topsham, ME 04086 USA  
1-207-729-4201 Fax: 1-207- 729-4453  
Email: worldhq@tdisdi.com

### SSI

Scuba Schools International  
2619 Canton Court  
Ft. Collins, CO 80525 USA  
1-970-482-0883 Fax: 1-970-482-6157  
Email: wdevore@divessi.com

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