

# SAFETY NOTES

Department of Consumer & Business Services  
Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Division  
Salem, OR 97310

## Fatality Report

Accident type ..... Asphyxiation  
Industry ..... Marine research  
Employee job title ..... Marine biologist

### **Description of accident**

The marine biologist was working as part of a four-person team diving in the Pacific Ocean just off the Oregon coast. The biologist and a diving partner were working in 50 feet of water when the partner observed that his air supply was running low. The diving partner signaled to the supervisor (the biologist) that he needed to return to the surface. The biologist approved the request and stayed behind to continue working on the ocean floor. The crew aboard the boat was instructed to monitor the air bubble stream from the biologist still working underwater. After six minutes, bubbles ceased rising to the surface and a diver was deployed for rescue. The marine biologist was discovered lying on his back with his mouth-piece beside him. Over ten minutes had elapsed from the last visual contact between the two divers working underwater. The diver was brought to the surface and CPR was performed on the victim immediately. The Coast Guard transported the victim to a hospital on land, where the victim was pronounced dead from an air embolism.



### **Investigation findings**

The employer did not have a system in place to ensure divers did not remain underwater if their air supply was too low. Divers were also allowed to exceed minimum air supply guidelines, and they weren't always in visual contact, as required by Oregon OSHA. The victim was allowed to exceed the maximum recommended dive time.

Investigators determined that the employer did not provide adequate instruction and supervision for employees, and did not follow Professional Association of Diving Instructors standards mandating use of the 'buddy system' when diving.

### **Applicable standards**

OAR 437-01-760 (1)(a)  
29 CFR 1910.424 (c)(2)