The Application of Technical Diving Lessons to Recreational Diving

For those that didn't attend the April LEWD meeting, Kevin Magee dressed up in his recreational dive gear and gave a presentation on the above topic. Below is a summary.

There are a lot of lessons from the revolution of technical diving that can now be applied to recreational diving to make it safer and more enjoyable. For example, the most noticed item of a technical diver's equipment is the "long" hose on the primary regulator. Instead of breathing your primary regulator and donating an octopus to an out-of-air diver, plan on donating your primary regulator - willingly or not - and then breathing your own backup (octopus) regulator. The 7-foot long hose makes sharing air much easier and allows room to get away from a frantic diver or to negotiate cramped quarters while sharing air. Kevin demonstrated that stowing the long hose is easy and will not strangle you when it is deployed. The best stowage is to tuck the extra length of hose under your waist belt and loop the remaining hose around the back of your head and into your mouth.

In order to quickly locate your octopus after donating your primary regulator, store it under your chin with a necklace of surgical tubing. This allows easy locating and access, something most recreational octopus stowage practices (special holders, inside a BC pocket, dangling loose, etc.) do not allow. You can still donate this regulator if another diver insists on "borrowing" it since it will pop out of the necklace if pulled. Or you can own an AIR.2, which also saves you the hassle of an extra hose on your regulator's first stage.

Redundancy of air sources may not be important to recreational divers, but it is for other equipment. This is especially true for gauges. Either have two computers or have a backup manual depth gauge, timer (watch), and tables with you underwater. This has saved many a dive trip or vacation since otherwise everything is dependent in one single battery. Make sure all backup computers/gauges are easily accessible and checked occasionally throughout a dive, otherwise they are not really of value if something happens.

It's also important to have redundancy with two cutting devices. Surgical shears are preferred as the primary cutting tool against nets, fishing line, and wires. Both cutting devices should be easily accessible with either hand. It is also nice - but not critical - to have the redundancy of two lights. Make sure your primary light is small enough to not tempt you to leave it behind for most daytime dives. The light can become a safety tool if you become lost from the dive boat and left adrift overnight, so it is always recommended to carry a light. Kevin also carries a small strobe to mark anchor lines and for similar safety reasons. Tethers are recommended for all lights since they are frequently lost items. This is actually not much different than the cord for most technical divers' canister lights.

Standard technical diving safety equipment can be very useful in recreational diving, especially in the Great Lakes. Use a reel in low visibility to help re-find the anchor line at the end of a dive. A safety reel (150'-200') is fine. Don't make the reel too big since it will tempt you to frequently leave it behind, and a large reel will take too long to reel back up at the end of a dive. A lift bag is great for recovering lost boat anchors and weight belts, and it can be easily stowed out of the way in a butt-mounted position using two loops of surgical tubing underneath the BC. A lift bag can also be used to mark your position during free ascents and as a signaling device if separated from the boat.

Finally, oxygen is always present among technical divers for decompression, but it is an invaluable first aid item that all divers should never be without. Carry or store a 40-cu.ft. stage bottle of oxygen on the boat for use in emergencies like drowning or DCS. Stage bottles are preferred because they are intuitive for most divers to use, and they allow a long time of breathing oxygen. They can also be used underwater, if necessary. They cannot be used for unconscious divers, however, but this is beyond the ability of most average divers to handle satisfactorily without outside (Coast Guard) assistance anyway.