



Ten Ways a Diver Can Protect the Underwater Environment

1. Dive carefully to protect fragile aquatic ecosystems

Many aquatic organisms are delicate and can be harmed by the bump of a camera, the swipe of a fin or even the gentle touch of a hand. Some aquatic organisms like corals grow very slowly and breaking even a small piece can destroy decades of growth. By being careful you can prevent long-term damage to magnificent dive sites.

2. Be aware of your body and equipment placement when diving

Keep your gauges and alternate air source secured so they don't drag over the reef or other vital habitat. Control your buoyancy, taking care not to touch fragile organisms with your body or equipment. You can do your part and prevent injury to aquatic life every time you dive.

3. Keep your dive skills sharp through continuing education

Before heading to open water seek bottom time with a certified professional in a pool or other environment that won't be damaged. You can also refresh your skills and knowledge with a PADI Scuba Review, PADI Advanced Open Water Diver course or Project AWARE Specialty course such as Peak Performance Buoyancy.

4. Consider how your interactions affect aquatic life

Avoid touching, handling, feeding or riding on aquatic life. These actions may stress the animal, interrupt feeding and mating behavior or provoke aggressive behavior in normally nonaggressive species.

5. Understand and respect underwater life

Playing with animals or using them as food for other species can leave a trail of destruction, disrupt local ecosystems and rob other divers of their experiences with these creatures. Consider enrolling in a PADI Underwater Naturalist, AWARE Fish Identification or Coral Reef Conservation Specialty course to better understand sustainable interactions.

6. Be an ecotourist

Make informed decisions when selecting a destination and choose Project AWARE Environmental Operators or other facilities dedicated to sustainable business practices. Obey all local laws and regulations and understand your effect on the environment. Don't collect souvenirs like corals or shells. Instead, take underwater photos and follow Project AWARE's *10 Tips for Underwater Photographers*.

7. Respect underwater cultural heritage

Divers are privileged to access dive sites that are part of our cultural heritage and maritime history. Wrecks can also serve as important habitats for fish and other aquatic life. Help preserve these sites for future generations by obeying local laws, diving responsibly and treating wrecks with respect.

8. Report environmental disturbances or destruction

As a diver, you're in a unique position to monitor the health of local waters. If you notice unusual depletion of aquatic life, injury to aquatic animals or strange substances in the water, report these observations to responsible authorities in your area.

9. Be a role model for other divers and nondivers when interacting with the environment

As a diver, you see the underwater results of carelessness and neglect. Set a good example in your own interactions so that others can learn from you.

10. Get involved in local environmental activities and issues

You can greatly affect your corner of the planet. There are plenty of opportunities to support healthy aquatic environments including Project AWARE conservation and data collection activities like local beach and underwater cleanups and CoralWatch monitoring, supporting environmental legislative issues, attending public hearings on local water resources, conserving water or making responsible seafood choices.