

Diver Disinfection 101

It is important to be potable water dedicated (PWD) and have the mentality of “if we don’t drink it, we don’t dive in it”. This includes the vehicles, all the external and internal equipment and the onsite personnel themselves. The water industry has spent much time and effort in separating water and sewer operations and this would all be for nought if someone knowingly (or unknowingly) contaminated our drinking water with waste substances.

Dry suits and full-face masks are a ‘given’ and there should be plenty of additional suits available onsite to allow for ‘wear and tear’ and also hot and cold weather conditions. Tanks fed from bores have been known to exceed 26 degrees in the middle of winter, so it is not always a ‘thick in winter and thin in summer’ dry suit policy.

There are no second chances with the pathogen control process. It has to be best practice in all things that we do, because disinfection can only reach the superficial areas of hoses, ropes, dive equipment and storage vehicles. Equipment is carried and stored in a dedicated vehicle that is used for no other purpose. All equipment is kept away from contaminated areas such as ground contact and clean areas are selected up on the roof of the tank to lay out equipment. Tarpaulin’s are used if the roof area is ‘less than clean’ – this is often the case where aerials and davit systems are close by the working site and are attracting birds to roost and thereby drop faecal material around the local area.

There will always be residual water left in the vacuuming hoses when moving from tank to tank and from client to client, so strict hygiene practices and being particular about where the equipment and personnel have been, are the best options to maintaining water quality and consumer confidence. No equipment is hired in or out to others, so we can control the ‘cleanliness’ process with a good degree of confidence.

Disinfection is used as a backup process on equipment if our existing processes are compromised by either the tank surfaces or the water itself - some potable water tanks are 'less than perfect' and even though consumers drink it (without realising the consequences) we clean down and disinfect our gear afterwards to protect the next client.

Many diving operations these days are 'multi-tasked' when it comes to operating in potable or waste water facilities, so total reliance on spraying down the diver and whatever pieces of equipment that are within easy reach, is not an effective or fail-safe means of pathogen control - it is merely 'ticking a box' and should never be relied upon as the water safety solution.