

Safety Stop

On one boat dive which I was diving, I was listening to the pre-dive briefing in preparation for our first dive. The dive master asked if there were any questions.

"Yeah, should we make a safety stop", one of the divers asked. Fresh out of his checkout dives, he couldn't remember the rules for when to make a safety stop.

The divemaster scoffed at him. "We'll hardly be going deep enough to require a safety stop."



I was faced with a dilemma, knowing that we should always do a safety stop, should I say something or should I just do my dive. Fast forward a few years. I've read a mountain of material for fun and as part of my professional development. Looking back on this occasion, what would I have done knowing what I know now? I most definitely would've said something to the dive master. What he was doing was putting divers at risk, when it was totally uncalled for. I personally made a safety stop, and would have suggested everyone else also do so.

In case it's been a while since you've had one, a safety stop is an approximately three minute stop made at 15-20 feet (5-7 meters) at the end of a dive. For deeper dives greater than 60 feet / 20 meters, they are usually considered a requirement, and optional for anything less.

The idea is that this brief time at a relatively shallow depth will eliminate a large amount of microbubbles, an effect strongly correlated with decompression sickness. Studies have shown that a safety stop eliminates virtually all detectable bubbles, decreasing the chances of decompression sickness drastically.