12 June 2020

RE: VIMS Dive Program COVID-19 Procedures and Guidance

Version 6 final

As an active member of the American Association of Underwater Scientists (AAUS) the VIMS dive program has been monitoring the latest developments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has profoundly impacted the scientific diving community and we recognize that risk mitigation and planning are necessary for the safe resumption and continuity of diving operations. Given this, the VIMS Diving Control Board (DCB) has convened numerous meetings and has developed the following policies and guidelines for addressing the virus as it relates to our dive program. We chose not to reiterate guidance found on other relevant website (listed below) but rather chose to focus on questions and concerns specific to the types of diving conducted within our program. To that end, as guidance and recommendations change this document will be revised as necessary.

Dive control board approved recommendations:

- *Until further notice all scientific diving operations at VIMS must be associated with projects approved by the Associate Dean of Research & Advisory Service in accordance with the Plan for Phased Expansion of On-Campus Operations.*

- All <u>practicum</u> portions of training and re-certifications for scientific diving, including but not limited to, CPR, first aid, AED, and DAN O2 training are suspended until further notice. Online or eLearning portions of the training or re-certification must be completed if training is required to obtain certification or as part of the recertification process to remain an active diver in the VIMS dive program.

- As per the VIMS diving manual, waivers may be issued by the DCB for the completion of required training, on a case by case basis. Any waivers issued by the DCB will not permanently exempt a diver from completing all the necessary training required for certification or re-certification. Waivers will provide exemptions for the practicum portions of required training with the clarification that within 30 days of lifting these restrictions, the diver must complete the practicums or the diver will be considered out of compliance. Waivers must be requested and approved in advance of dive plan submittals.

- **All** submitted dive plans shall have clear and specific information on how dive members plan to reduce COVID-19 exposure. For example, dive plans may include procedures for wiping down boarding ladders, separating dive equipment and passing off scientific samples. No dive plans will be approved without including criteria to address COVID-19.

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- No VIMS dive gear will enter the dive locker upon return from the field. All returned VIMS dive equipment (regulators, BCDs, and cylinders) must be given an initial disinfecting treatment with DSO provided disinfectant and rinsed and then left outside on the dive deck. The DSO will then complete the disinfecting process. Details on disinfecting gear can also be provided by the DSO.

- All personal gear (including but not limited to masks, snorkels, wetsuits, skins, personal BCDs and dive boots) is banned from entering the dive locker until further notice. All personal dive gear will be disinfected offsite by the diver following protocols outlined by AAUS.

- At end of each day's operations, the lead diver must communicate to the DSO any incident or accident involving a breach of set forth COVID-19 protocols.

Resources:

The COVID-19 mitigation procedures, as they relate to the diving activities, will be reviewed and approved by the DSO following the guidelines and or recommendations from AAUS, DAN, W&M, VIMS and\or CDC. These guidelines and recommendations can be found at the following websites:

> https://aaus.org/AAUS/Covid-19_Resources.aspx
> https://www.diversalertnetwork.org/covid-19/
> https://www.wm.edu/about/administration/emergency/current_issues/coronavirus/
> https://www.vims.edu/intranet/emergency_info/messages/index.php
> https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html