

DOING IT RIGHT

by David Strike

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A term that's being heard increasingly often in recreational and technical diving. 'Doing It Right' ('DIR'), is a snappy phrase that's surrounded by debate and controversy – and one that's frequently misunderstood.

Coined by leading members of the Florida-based, Woodville Karst Plain Project (WKPP) – one of the world's most experienced and successful cave diving teams – 'Doing It Right' is more than just a proven system or equipment configuration. It's a holistic approach to diving that puts equal emphasis on fitness, experience, attitude, teamwork training and safety.

Refining the minimalist approach to equipment as practiced in the 'Hogarthian' system (named after noted cave-diving explorer, Bill Hogarth Main), the DIR system of gear configuration is centered on a standardised system that lends itself to any diving application, from single cylinder, open-water diving through to extreme exploration diving in an overhead environment.

Based on the concept that diving equipment should be streamlined and uncluttered – and that, from a safety viewpoint, diving buddies or members of a team should be as familiar with each other's equipment as they are with their own – the core elements of the DIR system consists of a rigid backplate (stainless steel or aluminium) with webbing harness, a back-mounted, or wings-style, buoyancy device; an alternate regulator attached to a short hose; and a primary regulator attached to a long (1.5 to 2m) hose. Beginning with this simple platform, the DIR philosophy extends into every aspect of advanced and extended range diving.

Maintaining strong opinions about the use of appropriate equipment; its proper functioning; the correct way of routing the hoses; and the accompanying mind-set that recognises the dual benefits of training and experience advocates of the DIR system continue to attract criticism for their unyielding views.

Frequently regarded as taking an unnecessary austere approach to diving – particularly by those who favour personal preference when it comes to their equipment and how it should be rigged – the sound underlying principles behind the DIR system are often pushed into the background by fierce debates that emphasise personality differences rather than the obvious practical benefits of a universal system or equipment configuration.

The fact is that while training programmes teach equipment handling skills and highlight the need for pre-dive buddy checks, a buddy pair with equipment that's rigged to their own preferences are going to be slower to render emergency assistance than a pair whose equipment arrangement is identical to one another's.

Similarly, an out-of-air situation will be more easily and rapidly managed if the donor employs a properly routed long hose for their primary regulator and passes this to an out of air buddy. The long hose also offers greater flexibility and proper control by the donor. Although many people appreciate the value of the DIR system of configuration – as well as the overall philosophy of safety in 'Doing It Right' – one of the biggest objections is the expense involved in the changeover.

Cost is something that should never be an issue in any category of diving. Particularly where personal safety is concerned. All too often, however, people take on the challenges posed by the more extreme forms of technical diving using equipment that's poorly suited to the task and claiming that they have every intention of upgrading when they can afford to do so.

In many cases, those intentions remain nothing more than a wish list of goals. An attitude reflected in their approach to training, one where any knowledge of, for example, the use of mixed gasses or decompression techniques takes second place to the imagined prestige of holding a certification card proclaiming them to be a 'technical diver'.

Requiring greater mental discipline and a more thorough understanding of all its theoretical principles in order to minimise the risks, the challenges and rewards of technical diving begin at an elementary level by 'Doing It Right'.