

## Diver Safety

### What happened?

There have been two recent commercial diving incidents requiring therapeutic decompression treatment for divers working offshore in the oil and gas industry. Both incidents occurred separately and both divers benefited from the immediate therapeutic decompression treatments they were given once symptoms of decompression sickness were identified.

### What went wrong?

Commercial diving incidents requiring therapeutic decompression treatment are comparatively rare in Australian waters. It must be remembered that decompression sickness is hard to predict - any person who has been subject to increased barometric pressure can suffer from decompression sickness or pressure related injuries. Even when the diving tables have been correctly followed, incidents requiring therapeutic decompression treatment can and do occur.

### Key Lessons:

Divers may require therapeutic decompression treatment for diving injuries caused in different ways and exhibiting different symptoms. In all diving incidents requiring therapeutic decompression treatment, early diagnosis and treatment of the symptoms are vital to ensure the diver's return to health. A delay in treatment can have an adverse affect on the treatment outcome.

When divers are exposed to increased barometric pressure from the surface to - 10 metres it is unlikely that they would develop symptoms of decompression sickness even when exposed to those increased pressures for prolonged periods of time. However, it is important to note that from -10 metres to the surface, a gas actually doubles in volume and can cause pressure related injuries to divers requiring therapeutic decompression treatment to be given.

Immediate therapeutic decompression treatment is the preferred treatment of choice for these types of diving related incidents. For this reason, it is important that commercial divers have timely access to diving medical advice and a decompression chamber properly manned and equipped to administer the therapeutic decompression treatments.

**Contact** for further information email [alerts@nopsa.gov.au](mailto:alerts@nopsa.gov.au) and quote Alert 22.