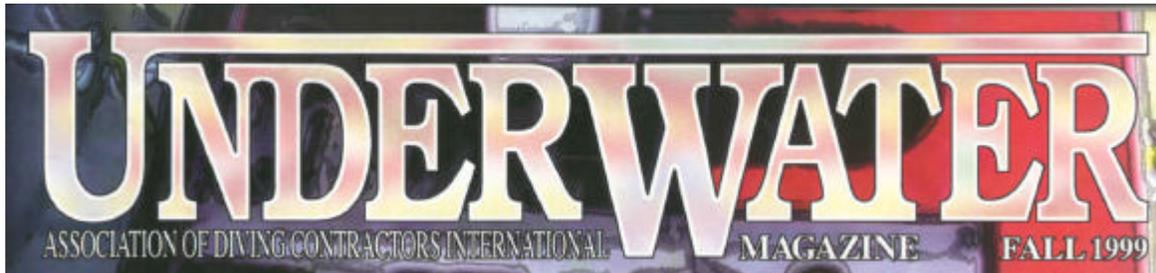


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Reef Balls helping to save natural reefs



Divers prepare to deploy a Reef Ball. The concrete balls are helping to conserve natural reef systems.

Even though environmental conservation efforts are constantly at the forefront of the underwater industry, natural disasters and human activities do more harm to the natural reefs of the world's oceans every day. The Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd., is working to help restore the oceans' natural resources by installing more than 1,010(0) Reef Balls

on the ocean floor each month.

What is a Reef Ball, you ask? Although it sounds like some new extreme sport, it is actually a man-made habitat strategically placed on the ocean floor to restore coral reefs and become a secure breeding ground for various types of marine life. Reef Balls are made of a special marine-friendly concrete and are designed to mimic natural reef systems. The balls come in custom sizes, ranging from six to 6,000 pounds, to best match the natural reef type being mimicked.

The Reef Ball Development Group, Ltd., has patented the design and works with non-profit groups like the Reef Ball Coalition and the Reef Ball Foundation to promote their use. The artificial reefs have been deployed around the world, including the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic oceans. They are also used in bays, canals, lakes, estuaries, and as breakwaters for beach erosion and protection.

Divers are most often involved in installing Reef Balls in floating deployment situations, which are usually smaller projects. In these situations, the divers assure proper placement during installation, and then retrieve the Polyform buoys and straps used in the process.

"We are always concerned with safety, and without proper care it could be a dangerous situation," says Jay Jorgensen of the Reef Ball Development Group. "After the balls sink, the bladder is released and can shoot to the top with considerable force. Therefore, you don't want to be directly above a deployment. You don't want to be below, either, for obvious reasons - like falling concrete."

When deploying larger Reef Balls with a barge and crane, divers are used for visual monitoring. The diver is able to use the Polyform bladder inside the balls to help maneuver them into position. "If they do not properly deploy, divers can be used to properly move them into place or get them upright," says Jorgensen. "Typically, air bags are used to move the Reef Balls around after they are deployed, if

movement is necessary."

Because monitoring is important for constantly improving the natural reef systems, divers perform routine inspections of the balls. The Reef Balls are constructed out of pH neutralized concrete specially formulated for placement in marine environments. To form a Reef Ball, up to 6,000 pounds of hot concrete is poured into a fiberglass mold containing a 3.1-inch diameter Polyform tilled buoy. Prior to the concrete pour, smaller nine-inch-diameter Polyform buoys are locked into the mold below the larger buoy to form "swimming holes." Once the concrete has hardened, the fiberglass shell and "swimming hole" inflatable buoys are removed, leaving the center buoy (or bladder). The entire unit is then towed to sea, where the center bladder is slowly deflated and removed as the Reef Ball descends to the ocean floor.

For information on Reef Balls, contact the Reef Ball Development Group at reefball@reef- or visit www.reefbal.com. **uw**

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