



Blue Star Diving Program Framework:

Partnering with Charter Diving and Snorkeling Operators to Encourage Responsible Diving Practices in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

I. Program Mission

The mission of the Blue Star Diving program is to partner with local businesses and community stakeholders to improve conservation of NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary through promoting responsible diving and snorkeling practices and enhancing visitor appreciation, understanding and protection of marine ecosystems.

II. Program Goal and Objectives

The goal of the Blue Star Diving program ("Blue Star") is to develop a voluntary education and recognition program and supporting materials for commercial dive and snorkel operators who are committed to coral reef conservation and education in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Program objectives include:

- A. Increase the awareness and knowledge of the marine ecosystem and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary among dive and snorkel operator staff and visitors;
- B. Provide divers and snorkelers with tools that allow them to enjoy the coral reef, marine ecosystem and maritime heritage resources now while making choices that will protect and conserve them for the future.
- C. Promote adoption of dive and snorkel best practices that reduce impacts of divers maritime heritage resources and marine ecosystems;
- D. Recognize and support dive and snorkel businesses participating in stewardship and conservation of NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary;
- E. Connect dive and snorkel operators with the Florida Keys environmental community and conservation organizations.

III. Background

The Blue Star program is managed by Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary as a voluntary recognition program. Blue Star recognizes dive and snorkel operators in the Florida Keys who meet and adhere to established program criteria designed to educate business staff and patrons on topics including the sanctuary, the coral reef ecosystem, cultural resources, and how individuals can protect marine resources through responsible diving and snorkeling.

Recognition in the Blue Star program is voluntary and involves no regulatory component. Requirements are structured to avoid recognized organizations incurring costs beyond those of regular operations. The program is similar to the Clean Marina program administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Dolphin SMART program implemented by NOAA, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and the Dolphin Ecology Project.

The Blue Star Program Framework was developed in 2004 with input from staff and owners of Florida Keys dive and snorkel businesses, REEF Environmental Education Foundation, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Development of the Blue Star program fulfills strategy E.4, activity 6, under the Education and Outreach Action Plan of Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's Final Management Plan (2007) and goal 1, objective 1.3 of Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' Strategic Plan (2017).

IV. Benefits of Blue Star Participation

A. Raising Public Awareness of the Blue Star Program

To ensure that the Blue Star program is effective in reaching divers and snorkelers and to create a further incentive for operators to participate in the program, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary will pursue the following public awareness activities.

1. Maintain a Blue Star webpage as part of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries website, including a complete list of Blue Star operators.
2. Promote the Blue Star program on various social media outlets.
3. Work with dive, travel, and other relevant media to promote the Blue Star program.
4. When feasible, present information about the program at relevant consumer and trade shows. Examples may include Dive Equipment and Marketing Association annual show and other events and festivals.
5. Work with Monroe County Tourist Development Council to increase awareness of the Blue Star Program.
6. Distribute Blue Star rack cards and promotional materials at locations such as hotels and visitor centers.

7. Work to get information about Blue Star in tourist guides and other relevant tourism and dive websites.
8. Provide program participants with decals for vessels, a plaque for display in storefront, branded dive flag, and additional educational and promotional materials.

Participants should also plan to cross promote NOAA Sanctuaries branded events to the extent that they do not incur any financial burdens. If promotional products are delivered, participants are expected to share those via social media, marketing channels, and distribute physical media when possible and appropriate.

B. Eligibility for Blue Star Diving Conservation Programs

1. Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys

Marine debris is one of the most widespread and persistent forms of pollution affecting the world's ocean and coastal waters. In response to the significant amount of marine debris left in the wake of Hurricane Irma, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation are working with local partners to identify and remove marine debris. You can play an integral role in helping the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary stay healthy and resilient. Blue Star operators are encouraged to participate in the [Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys](https://floridakeys.noaa.gov/CleanSeasFloridaKeys/) (https://floridakeys.noaa.gov/CleanSeasFloridaKeys/). Program participants who have completed their current year Blue Star requirements and secured appropriate permits may be eligible for funding to support marine debris removal activities through the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Contact bluestar.diving@noaa.gov for more information.

2. Blue Star Coral Restoration Program

The Florida Keys region has become a world leader in coral reef restoration. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, coral restoration practitioners and local dive operators are developing a tiered framework for engaging Blue Star Diving participants in the [Mission: Iconic Reefs initiative](#). For more information please contact bluestar.diving@noaa.gov.

V. Eligibility for Program Recognition

Businesses or organizations licensed to conduct for-hire dive and/or snorkel charters based in the Florida Keys and originating and operating within the waters of Florida Keys National Marine

Sanctuary, as either the primary or secondary purpose of their operation, are eligible to be recognized as Blue Star Diving operators.

Some charter businesses may combine dive or snorkel trips with other water-based activities (i.e. kayaking, fishing, wildlife viewing). Blue Star recognized operators agree to follow all program criteria, including providing a modified version of the Blue Star briefing to their customers, regardless of the type of charter they are running on a given day. The full Blue Star briefing should be provided on all dive and snorkel charters.

Note 1: Recognition by the Blue Star program does not create any right to renewal and does not represent a waiver by NOAA to seek penalties that are provided by law if violations are discovered.

Note 2: Recognition by the Blue Star program does not ensure that the vessel complies with U.S. Coast Guard safety inspection or other applicable safety and insurance requirements. Patrons are encouraged to ask businesses if they maintain current inspection, license, and insurance documentation.

Definitions of Program Roles

- A. **Blue Star Program Coordinator** - This role will be fulfilled by Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary staff member(s).
- B. **Blue Star Representative** - Other Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary staff member or designated volunteer who may conduct annual ride along evaluation. This person will be trained in all required components of the Blue Star Program (*see section IV*).
- C. **Shop Owner/Manager** - Responsible party for Blue Star certification compliance. The owner and/or manager of a dive shop or organization may choose to designate a Blue Star Liaison to implement the program components at their site but is ultimately responsible for ensuring their organization meets these requirements.
- D. **Blue Star Liaison** - Designated staff member at a shop or organization who is in charge of making sure the shop or organization is meeting Blue Star Program requirements. This liaison should be proactive in training staff, keeping a record of Blue Star activities (annual conservation activity, continuing education), responding to communications from the Blue Star Program Coordinator, participating in the annual ride-along evaluation and framework review, and should be a full-time staff member (or supervised by a full-time staff member) that has work time allocated to support tracking these program requirements (1-2 hours per month).

VI. Program Criteria

To be recognized in the Blue Star program, a dive or snorkel operator must meet the following criteria:

A. Train all staff to a standard of knowledge.

Staff training shall be accomplished using the online training website

<http://www.sanctuarybluestar.org/training/> covering the following subjects:

1. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
2. Sanctuary Zones
3. Coral Reef Ecosystem
4. Coral Reef Etiquette
5. Maritime Heritage
6. Threats to Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Ecosystems

Operators seeking recognition must designate a staff member to act as the Blue Star Liaison who will be responsible for record keeping and communication regarding staff training, continuing education, and conservation related activities. This role should be filled by a full-time staff member (or supervised by a full-time staff member) that has work time allocated to support tracking these program requirements (1-2 hours per month). The Blue Star Liaison should be able to produce the documentation upon request from Blue Star Program Coordinator or designee. Should the Blue Star Liaison leave your organization the owner or manager is responsible for contacting the Blue Star Program Coordinators and designating a new staff member to fulfill the role of Blue Star Liaison within one month of their departure.

B. Conduct a pre-dive educational briefing.

Prior to any patrons entering the water, participating program staff (whether captain or mate) must conduct the Blue Star educational briefing. Participants will be provided with a waterproof card to assist in the briefing. Briefing must cover the following:

1. Diving in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
2. Sanctuary Marine Zones
3. Coral Reef Ecosystem
4. Coral Reef Etiquette
 - a) Gloves prohibited on reef dives (See section O)
5. Maritime Heritage
 - a) Marine Debris vs. Artifacts
6. Threats
7. What is Blue Star and How to Learn More with Binder

C. Use mooring buoys when available. Anchor carefully in accordance with sanctuary regulations when mooring is not possible.

Anchoring on living coral in water less than 40 feet deep when the seabed is visible is prohibited (15 CFR 922.163(a)(5)(ii)). Anchoring within any Sanctuary Preservation Area (SPA) or Ecological Reserve (ER) when a mooring buoy is available is prohibited. Dive shops are encouraged to opt to move to a different dive site or live boat instead of anchoring whenever possible throughout the entire sanctuary (15 CFR 922.164(d)(1)(vi)). Participating dive shops are strongly encouraged to maintain an active line of communication with Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary regarding mooring buoys. If you notice a buoy that needs to be maintained or replaced please contact Brady Booton at brady.booton@noaa.gov. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary welcomes suggestions for new locations for mooring buoys if operators find their vessels frequently using anchors in a particular location.

D. Comply with all laws, marine regulations, and best practices; ensure guest compliance to the best of your abilities.

Participants agree to abide by all resource protection laws and regulations enforced by, and not limited to, the following agencies: Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations, U.S. Coast Guard, State natural resources departments, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and act as a responsible role model for guests.

Should you witness guests violating any laws, regulations, or best practices, immediately correct the behavior in the water and discuss proper scuba diving and/or snorkeling etiquette in a post dive briefing.

E. Document Pump Out Procedure.

Pump out procedure must be documented with either an invoice for services rendered, evidence of pump on premises, or other.

F. Incorporate Blue Star Reef Etiquette Video into booking confirmations.

Program participants must ensure that all divers and snorkelers are sent the [Blue Star Reef Etiquette video](#) prior to their trip. The suggested method is to provide the video in a booking confirmation email with the following language; "Prior to your arrival, please watch [this short video](#) to learn more about diving and snorkeling in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and how you can help to protect this special place!" Shops are also encouraged to display the video on loop in retail locations and share it via social media.

G. Prominently display- in storefront, or on vessel- brochures and other educational materials offered by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Including Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary brochure, Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center brochure, and/or Blue Star brochure. If no shore-side storefront is available for the operator, appropriate brochures and other educational materials must be offered to customers during the charter. Upon request, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary can provide a plastic brochure rack for program participants.

H. Prominently display Blue Star sticker, plaque, and/or dive flag on vessel AND in shop or storefront.

Sticker and/or plaque should be clearly visible to divers and other vessels. If no shore-side storefront is available, participants must place it on vessel. Additional stickers may be made available upon request for new vessels or replacements.

I. Offer at least one conservation-related specialty course.

This criterion does not apply to snorkel-only participants. Examples include: buoyancy control, REEF fish identification, or underwater naturalist. Blue Star Program Coordinator will provide participants with a list of applicable courses, and instructors may submit courses to Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary for approval.

J. Offer at least one conservation-related special activity to the public per calendar year.

Examples include: reef cleanups, mangrove cleanups, REEF fish counts, Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys cleanups, participation in coral restoration, etc. Activities not listed may be approved by the Blue Star Program Coordinator. Conservation-related activities may occur after the operator is recognized, but must be completed within the calendar year. Initial recognition will be awarded on an operator's commitment to offer a conservation-related activity by the end of the year.

K. Require all staff to attend a sanctuary resource conservation-related continuing education opportunity each calendar year.

In order to continuously stay informed of environmental issues in the Florida Keys and to impart additional stewardship information to customers, participating staff are required

to attend any one of the marine conservation lectures or presentations offered every year by Florida Keys agencies and nonprofits, most of which are provided at no cost.

Examples include, but are not limited to: Mote's BleachWatch training, REEF's lionfish safe handling/collection training, REEF Fish n' Friends lectures, History of Diving Museum lectures, Coral Restoration Foundation training, Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Museum, and Florida Keys Community College's sanctuary seminar series. Blue Star Program Coordinator(s) will provide participants with notice of applicable presentations when possible. Presentations not on the list may be approved by the Blue Star Program Coordinator(s). Lectures or presentations must be marine science/conservation related. The continuing education requirement may be fulfilled after the operator is recognized, but must be completed within the calendar year. Recognition will be awarded on the operator's commitment that all staff will complete the continuing education requirement by the end of the year.

L. Recycle engine oil and engage in clean boating practices.

Operators must have a documented process for engine oil recycling. It is recommended that operators carry an oil spill response kit aboard their vessel that includes absorbent pads. Be mindful of cleaning products used while washing down vessels. Visit <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/clean-marina> to find out more.

M. Reduce waste on vessels.

Operators must provide adequate facilities on-board vessels to dispose of waste responsibly without allowing it to enter the marine environment. Recycling of glass, plastic, cans, and paper is strongly encouraged throughout the business. Operators should eliminate single-use plastics onboard vessels unless required for safety reasons.

N. Educate customers on the harmful impacts of sunscreen on coral reefs.

Prior to departing for trips, educate customers on the impacts that sunscreens can have on coral reefs and suggest less harmful alternatives. If sunscreen is offered on a vessel, it must not contain chemicals that have been found harmful to corals. While no sunscreen has been proven to be completely 'reef-friendly', those with non-nano titanium oxide or zinc oxide, which are natural mineral ingredients, are more environmentally friendly alternatives. The Blue Star Program and NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary do not endorse any specific brands.

O. Require divers not to wear gloves on reef dives unless necessary for safety or health reasons.

Research has shown that divers who are wearing gloves are significantly more likely to impact the reef during a dive. This causes damage to delicate reef organisms, transmits diseases, creates a false sense of security for divers encountering dangerous marine life, and generally threatens the health of the reef ecosystem. Blue Star Diving operators will require divers not to wear gloves on reef dives unless necessary for safety or health reasons.

P. Maintain open and frequent communication with Blue Star Program Coordinator and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and respond to requests in a timely manner.

Open and frequent communication is essential to ensuring the effectiveness and success of the Blue Star program. If a Blue Star operator has not responded to a request made via email from the Blue Star Coordinator, the Blue Star Coordinator will take the following steps:

1. Send two separate emails to the Blue Star operator requesting response and follow up.
2. Call the Blue Star operator and leave a message, requesting a response, if the owner or Blue Star liaison is not available.

If the Blue Star operator has not responded to requests within one month of the initial contact they will be notified that their Blue Star recognition will be temporarily suspended and their organization will be removed from the Blue Star website until contact is re-established.

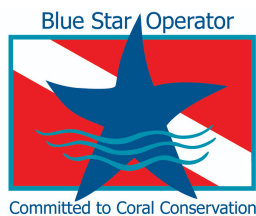
Once contacted, the Blue Star Coordinator will work with the Blue Star operator to initiate the re-evaluation process (see page 11, [section VII C](#)). Once program requirements are complete the Blue Star operator will be reinstated and their information will be added to the Blue Star website again.

Q. Link to the Blue Star website and prominently display the logo on business website homepage.

Hyperlink the Blue Star logo provided by Blue Star Program Coordinator to the website: <http://floridakeys.noaa.gov/onthewater/bluestar.html> and prominently display on the homepage. This applies only if the operator maintains a website. Participants are not required to create a website in order to participate in the Blue Star Program.

R. Comply with the following logo use policy and agree to immediately remove the Blue Star logo from any materials found by NOAA in violation of the use policy.

Use of the Blue Star logo is given on condition that the operator (1) has completed the current year's program requirements as outlined in the program framework, and (2) uses the logo in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the purposes of the Blue Star Program.



Use of the Blue Star logo must meet the following criteria: Use of the logo (1) must at all times be consistent with and promote the purposes of the Blue Star Program; (2) may not include partisan political views; (3) may not be used in association with vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive terms/posts that target protected classes (for example, but not limited to, race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, transgender status, and pregnancy), national origin, age (40 years of age and over), genetic information (including family medical history) or disability (physical or mental); (4) may not be used to promote services or products of or to endorse companies not participating in Blue Star; and (5) may not be used as part of social media profiles, profile images, handles, or other primary identifiers of a user. Use of the logo is limited to the Blue Star operators and may not be shared with other companies or entities or be used to endorse another company or entity.

Complaints about violation of this logo policy will be processed according to Section VIII of the Framework with the exception of B.5, which provides the operator 30 days to remedy a violation. Any person or entity authorized to use the logo (as described above) found by NOAA to be using the Blue Star logo in violation of these conditions agrees to immediately stop using the logo unless/until arrangements have been made to remedy violations.

VII. Process for Program Participation

A. Initial Evaluation for Program Recognition

1. Business owner or manager contacts Blue Star Diving Program Coordinator indicating desire to participate.
2. Shop owner/manager and Blue Star Program Coordinator schedule a meeting to discuss current framework requirements and compatibility.
3. If both parties agree to move forward, the Blue Star Program Coordinator provides the business owner/manager with a checklist of Blue Star program components and criteria, as well as materials to help the business prepare for an evaluation before participation and recognition are confirmed. Business Owner, Blue Star Liaison if applicable, and Blue Star Coordinator sign the Blue Star Diving Operator Agreement.
4. The shop owner will hold an all staff meeting (in person or virtual) where a Blue Star Coordinator will give a short presentation to staff about the Blue Star program requirements, shop staff responsibilities, importance of dive briefing, and other topics. At this point the operator's Blue Star Liaison should be identified so they can be introduced to the Blue Star Coordinator and staff.
5. The designated Blue Star Liaison ensures that all staff are trained to the program standards outlined in the framework via the online training website, continuing education programs, and a presentation from the Blue Star Coordinator.
6. When prepared, business owner/manager contacts Blue Star Program Coordinator to request an evaluation to verify that the business is aligning with the Blue Star Framework.
7. Evaluation occurs within four weeks of request.
 - a) Blue Star Program Coordinator (or Blue Star Representative) meets with participant at the business site on a mutually convenient date to review evaluation checklist.
 - b) Blue Star Liaison submits Blue Star Diving Requirement Tracker to Blue Star Coordinator for review.
 - c) Blue Star Program Coordinator (or Blue Star Representative) observes a complete dive or snorkel charter to ensure the briefing includes required educational information, and that the captain (and other staff when applicable) is following program criteria.
 - d) Evaluation results are provided within two weeks of site visit and review of information.
8. Following successful completion of the evaluation, the shop or organization becomes officially recognized as a Blue Star operator. The shop receives recognition materials (see Section VI.C) and is included on all Blue Star materials as appropriate and feasible.
9. If the owner/manager does not meet all program criteria following the evaluation, the Blue Star Program Coordinator provides a letter/email describing the manner in which the business is not meeting the program criteria and how

best to revise its practices to conform. The Blue Star Program Coordinator provides technical assistance, when possible. After reviewing the evaluation and making any suggested changes, the owner/manager contacts the Blue Star Program Coordinator to arrange for a re-evaluation. The re-evaluation will be scheduled no later than four weeks after the request is made. If the request for reevaluation is made within three months of the initial evaluation, only areas in which the criteria are not being met will be reevaluated. If the request is made more than three months after the initial evaluation, a full evaluation will be conducted.

B. Annual Evaluation

Annual evaluation of participants is essential to gauge the program's effectiveness and success, which relies on participants continuing to follow the program criteria after their initial evaluation and recognition as a Blue Star participant. The goal of annual evaluation is to ensure that the Blue Star criteria are being followed, not to eliminate participants from the program, and to gather feedback for program improvement. Therefore, the focus of the annual evaluation process is providing constructive comments to participants on their operations as related to Blue Star and working with them to meet program criteria. Each operator will work with the Blue Star Coordinators to develop two action items to work on for the following years evaluation.

1. All Blue Star participants, regardless of how many vessels and captains are associated with their business, are evaluated at least once per year.
2. A trained Blue Star representative conducts the annual evaluation. Evaluation techniques may include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Prearranged ride-along, which may include participating in scuba diving to assess underwater program components, by a Blue Star Program Coordinator or Blue Star Representative with feedback provided to the operator at the end of the trip.
 - b) Unscheduled ride-along with anonymous, trained representatives with feedback provided at a later date.
 - c) Customer evaluations in-person or online.
 - d) Coworker evaluations submitted to Blue Star Program Coordinator.
3. Representatives conducting Blue Star evaluations are trained and screened to ensure objectivity and accuracy.
 - a) The representative evaluates for adherence to the Blue Star framework criteria using a standard reporting form.
 - b) At the conclusion of the charter, the representative identifies him- or herself to the operator as a Blue Star Representative and reviews the evaluation results, noting any areas of concern and offering recommendations on how to address them.
 - c) The Blue Star Coordinator(s) and operator will work together to outline two achievable action items for the following years evaluation. These are items that the operators will work towards improving throughout the year.
 - d) The operator has the opportunity on the form to note any areas of disagreement regarding the evaluation.

- e) The representative notifies the operator that he/she will receive a copy of the evaluation results via mail, fax or email from the Blue Star Program Coordinator.
 - f) The representative explains how the operator can challenge the evaluation if he/she disagrees with any observations or conclusions contained in the report.
 - g) If a representative observes what he/she believes may be a violation of the law, the incident will be reported to the appropriate enforcement agency.
 - h) The representative provides the evaluation form to the Blue Star Program Coordinator, who forwards a copy to the participating business or organization.
4. If a Blue Star participant disagrees with the findings of an annual evaluation, the following process applies:
- a) The program participant submits a written description of the discrepancy.
 - b) After reviewing both the evaluation and the participant's account, the program coordinator will decide whether the participant did not satisfy the criteria, triggering the process in Section VI.8 below.
 - c) If the program coordinator determines that the participant successfully met the program criteria, this will be noted on the evaluation form and the participant will be provided recognition materials for the next calendar year.
5. If there are any areas of deviation from the program criteria noted in evaluation:
- a) The participant will be made aware of the deviations to the program criteria and will be provided 30 days to revise its practices.
 - b) To the extent feasible, the Blue Star coordinator is available to provide assistance to the participant.
 - c) The participant is re-evaluated after the 30-day timeframe described above through an unannounced spot check, second representative evaluation, meeting with Blue Star Program Coordinator, or pre-arranged ride along by the Program Coordinator or representative.
 - d) The participant will not receive recognition materials for the next calendar year until the operator completes a successful evaluation, having revised its practices to meet the Blue Star criteria.
6. Program Coordinator verifies refresher training, continuing education and conservation-related activity record.
7. Program Coordinator documents progress by operator towards improving action items outlined in the previous years evaluation.
8. Upon successful evaluation, the program participant receives recognition materials for the next calendar year.
9. Participants are welcome to provide feedback on the evaluation process to the program coordinator at all times.
10. Additional spot checks may be carried out on a random or unannounced basis to ensure that all participants continue to meet the program criteria.

11. Complaints from members of the public or other program participants that a participant is not following program criteria will be handled according to the procedure described in Section VII, below.

C. Re-Evaluation

If a Blue Star operator is unable to meet the program requirements as outlined in this Framework within the timeline above their Blue Star recognition will be suspended, and they will be removed from the Blue Star website, pending re-evaluation.

The Blue Star Liaison is responsible for contacting the Blue Star Coordinator to schedule a meeting to discuss re-evaluation. During this meeting the operator will outline where they failed to comply with the Blue Star framework and what changes they have implemented to ensure future compliance. At this time the operator will schedule a date for a ride along and re-evaluation with the Blue Star Coordinator.

After a ride along evaluation has successfully been completed the Blue Star operator will be re-established and will receive the current year's recognition materials.

VIII. Complaints Procedure

The following procedure establishes a process to address complaints received by the program coordinator(s) about Blue Star participants not meeting the program criteria.

A. Telephone or Verbal Complaints

1. A record of the conversation is made and the complainant will be asked to put their concerns in writing. The complainant is advised that an anonymous copy of a written complaint will be provided to the program participant against whom the complaint is made. The written complaint procedure, Section VII.B below, then applies.
2. No further action will be taken unless a signed, written complaint is received.

B. Written Complaints

1. Complaints are date stamped and copied to the Blue Star program coordinator.
2. The program coordinator assesses whether the complaint relates to the Blue Star program criteria not being followed. If the complaint does not relate to the program criteria, no further action is taken.
3. If the program coordinator determines that the participant has deviated from the program criteria, the participant is given 30 days to address areas of concern. This may include a meeting with the participant to clarify any points.

4. The participant is then re-evaluated through an unannounced spot-check, a meeting with the Blue Star program coordinator or pre-arranged ride-along. The program coordinator will select the most appropriate evaluation method.
5. If, within any twelve-month period, two complaints are received and determined to be valid, the participant will be ineligible for the Blue Star program for one year. The participant will be removed from Blue Star program materials, will be required to return any Blue Star stickers, and will not receive an annual renewal decal.
6. The participant may request re-evaluation for renewed participation after one year of non-participation.

Note 1: Any complaint from the public that appears to describe a violation of the law will be forwarded to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, or U.S. Coast Guard for action, as appropriate.

Note 2: If any complaint that is investigated by a law enforcement agency results in a judgement against the participant, the participant will be dropped from the program. Future reinstatement is at the discretion of the Blue Star Program Coordinator and FKNMS.

IX. Framework Review

An annual review of the framework will ensure that the Blue Star program is functioning as intended and provide the opportunity to address issues that were not foreseen when the framework was developed initially. Participating operators are encouraged to provide feedback for program improvement throughout the year.

A. March

In March of each year, current Blue Star participants are notified via email or phone call that the annual framework review is beginning, which will include but is not limited to: interviews with and received suggestions from participants, the public, Sanctuary Advisory Council members, or other appropriate parties. A webinar may be held, and all Blue Star operators will be encouraged to attend, during which operators can provide feedback on the Blue Star framework and suggestions for program modification and improvement.

B. April

The program coordinator reviews input from participants and others, along with any internal proposals, and completes a new draft of the framework if necessary by the end of April.



C. May

By May, the program coordinator will complete a new draft of the framework if revisions are necessary. The new draft framework is circulated among current operators for comment, with 30 days to respond.

D. June

Comments are reviewed, and the revised final framework provided to current operators and program partners in June. Operators agree to abide by all amendments to Blue Star Diving criteria.

E. July-December

Blue Star Diving operators have six (6) months to ensure their practices meet the revised criteria. The revised criteria are used for all operator evaluations in the upcoming renewal year and the online refresher training will be based on the revised criteria. Participants agree to abide by all amendments to the Blue Star criteria. Blue Star operators are responsible for scheduling their annual ride along in order to receive their current year certification sticker. As of January 1st each year participants are recognized for their successful implementation of Blue Star requirements.

For questions about or feedback for the Blue Star Diving Program please contact the Blue Star Program Coordinator(s) at bluestar.diving@noaa.gov or by calling 305-809-4727 or 305-434-9385.