

Underwater photography is an incredible way to capture the vibrant life beneath the waves, and maintaining your gear after each dive is just as important as the shots you take. After 12 years of diving and shooting—from tiny day boats to multi-week liveaboards—I've learned that how you handle your underwater camera housing in the rinse tank can make the difference between perfectly functioning equipment and a flooded nightmare. In fact, I once flooded a housing during year two of my underwater photo adventures; the lesson stuck hard.



One of the most common pain points onboard dive boats is sharing rinse tanks. Multiple photographers pour their valuable gear and sensitive components divephotoguide.com into the same water, demanding thoughtful etiquette to keep everyone's equipment safe. This post delves deep into best practices and guidelines for **shared camera rinse tank etiquette** on dive boats, focusing on saltwater removal, safe handling, corrosion prevention, and backing up your data before and after dives. We'll also cover critical topics like the placement of strobe arms in rinse tanks, the importance of controlled freshwater rinses, and avoiding housing collisions.

Why Rinse Tanks Are Critical

Immediately after a dive, saltwater residues left on your underwater camera housing, buttons, dials, hinges, and especially electrical connections can cause corrosion and malfunction if not properly flushed out. Salt crystals, if allowed to dry and accumulate, will degrade sealing surfaces like O-rings and interfere with buttons and dials. Proper rinsing prevents this.



On shared rinse tanks, where often multiple housings, strobes, arms, and other gear are dunked together, it's crucial to follow etiquette to avoid accidental damage.

Before You Open: Complete Saltwater Removal

The foundational rule: *remove all saltwater from your housing before opening it.*

Why? Saltwater inside your housing spells disaster. It can corrode electronics and ruin your entire shoot. Here's how to ensure this step is flawless:

- **Extend your controlled freshwater rinse:** After removing your housing from the ocean, dip it thoroughly in the rinse tank for several minutes. This flush dislodges salt deposits from every button, dial, hinge, and especially the *electrical connections*.
- **Use gentle, controlled movements:** Avoid bouncing your housing against others or slamming it into tank walls. Instead, submerge and rotate your housing slowly to ensure salt is rinsed evenly from crevices.
- **Check for residual salt:** Bring a tiny flashlight onboard (one I always carry just for O-ring inspections) and shine it through buttons and gaps after rinsing to visually ensure all salt has dissolved. Don't rely on just feeling the housing; salt can be hidden in hinges and locks.

Only after you are confident your housing is entirely fresh—no salty film anywhere—should you go about opening it. Remember, a leaked housing is far worse than spending an extra few minutes rinsing.

Safe Handling in Shared Rinse Tanks

A common mistake is tossing your housing into a rinse tank with little regard for other photographers' gear. The resulting collisions can damage delicate components like strobe arms and electronic ports.

Best Practices for Shared Rinse Tank Use:

1. **Assign personal zones:** If possible, or ask the dive guide to set zones within the tank so each person's equipment is kept separate.
2. **Avoid housing collisions:** Use your hands to gently place and retrieve your housing from the tank. Don't let different rig pieces bang together.

3. **Strobe arms in rinse tank:** Many divers are tempted to dunk strobes and arms directly into tanks. Instead, rinse strobe arms separately where possible. If placed in a shared tank, make sure arms are secured and separated from camera housings to prevent scratching and bent joints.
4. **Label chargers and cables with masking tape:** This helps you identify your gear quickly and avoids accidental mishandling or mixing of parts underwater or in rinse tanks.

Respecting your fellow photographers' equipment goes a long way to maintaining harmony and preserving delicate underwater photo gear.

Dry Workspace Habits to Avoid Corrosion

After rinsing, drying and proper workspace habits become the next front in corrosion prevention.

- **Dry gently with microfiber towels:** Saltwater residues left on surfaces cause corrosion. Pat your housing dry carefully—don't rub aggressively near seals.
- **Keep workspace clean and dry:** Avoid placing your housing directly on wet surfaces, especially metal tables or near wet dive gear that may splash.
- **Separate wet and dry zones:** Create designated areas on the boat to manage equipment immediately after rinse—wet zones for housing before drying, then move to dry zones before opening.
- **Check and maintain O-rings at each stage:** Remove and examine your O-ring before and after dives to ensure it is clean and free from salt and debris.

Believe me, a small habit like keeping a dry workspace to avoid corrosion can save hundreds of dollars in repair fees and hours of frustration. Don't underestimate the power of habit.

Two-Device Backups and Verification

One of my biggest pet peeves is photographers who edit photos obsessively without creating a second backup. Don't be that person.

Backing up your underwater photos is essential because you never know when a memory card might fail, or your camera housing might flood despite precautions. Here's what I recommend:

1. **Bring at least two memory cards per dive day:** Never erase your only card at the start of the day without confirming backups exist from the prior day.
2. **After each dive session, immediately copy files to a laptop or external drive:** Then verify file integrity before deleting original files.
3. **Consider cloud backups:** When internet access is available, upload your images to cloud storage for off-boat redundancy.
4. **Double-check backups before you format cards:** This annoyance may seem minor, but many costly losses happen because a card was accidentally wiped too early.

Creating a solid backup routine reduces panic and loss of thousands of images and memories.

Summary Table: Key Etiquette Dos and Don'ts for Shared Rinse Tank Use

Dos Don'ts Thoroughly rinse housings in controlled freshwater before opening Open housings with saltwater residue inside Place housings gently in rinse tanks, avoiding contact and collisions Toss gear into rinse tanks or let

housings bang together Rinse strobe arms separately or keep well-spaced in tanks Dunk strobe arms without care in crowded rinse tanks Create and use dry, clean workspace areas post-rinse Allow housings or electronics to sit wet on potentially corrosive surfaces Implement a two-device backup and verification photo workflow Format memory cards before confirming secure backups

Final Thoughts

Shared camera rinse tanks on dive boats are a necessary part of underwater photography, but they require mutual respect, patience, and adherence to best practices to prevent damage and costly mistakes. Following these guidelines for saltwater removal, safe handling, workspace maintenance, and backup data management will keep your underwater camera housing, buttons, dials, hinges, and electrical connections in top condition.

Remember, your gear is your lifeline underwater. Treat rinse tanks as carefully as your camera—and you'll enjoy many more fantastic dives and photos.

Happy diving, and keep those lenses dry!