

## Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease

### What is Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD)?

SCTLD is a devastating coral disease that started in the Miami area and has spread to nearly all the Florida reef tract and is spreading through the Caribbean, including Cozumel. First appearing in 2014 this disease has been rapidly spreading and affects more than 20 different coral species, this constitutes half the hard-coral species in Florida. In some areas this has resulted in the equivalent to local extinction of certain corals.

Scientists are still uncertain as to what exactly started this outbreak, but one thing they are certain of is that the most devastating effects are felt on corals that are under stress. So, in order for restoration efforts to be successful we must relieve the stress from the corals. Improving water quality, reducing run off, and keeping trash out of our oceans are just a few of the ways to relieve stress on the ecosystem. Another BIG item that most scientists seem to agree on is to use reef-friendly sunscreen and wear sun-protection clothing to reduce the need for sunscreen. The chemicals in common sunscreen can be detected in the water within minutes of a person entering the water. **Non-reef safe sunscreen has now been banned in Cozumel.**

Wear UV protecting rash guards or clothing while on the surface as well as when you're diving or snorkeling. **Roberta's Scuba Shack now has UV protecting gear with our signature logos available for purchase at the dive shop.**

Poor water quality has also been attributed to the rapid spread of this disease. A possible contributor to this is another rapidly expanding problem in the Caribbean, massive blooms of Sargassum algae (seaweed) have been spreading across the Atlantic. See our related article in this month's newsletter on this issue.

It is due to the threat and impact of SCTLD and the poor water quality issues in and around the marine park that are leading the Marine Park Authority to **CLOSE the Palancar and Columbia Reefs to divers.**

### What can divers do?

Divers are urged to do their part to help stop this epidemic. In addition to using safer UV protection, using proper diving techniques is essential to protecting the corals. Be vigilant with your buoyancy. Stay up off the bottom, keep a safe distance from the walls and most of all **CONTROL YOUR FINNING**. Know what is behind you before you kick, avoid using a large scissor kick (flutter kick) motion and instead use a shorter kick or frog kick.

Decontaminating your gear can also help prevent the spread of this disease, especially if you've been diving in an affected area. This will help prevent

spreading to the area you are diving the next day that may not be as affected. Rinse your gear in fresh water using a disinfection solution, including rinsing out the internal bladder of your BCD. Allow your gear to air dry. And of course, always remove any visible weeds or other contaminants from your gear.

Another thing divers can do is talk to your dive your dive shops and dive friends about this this issue. Help to educate and spread the word. Encourage your local dive shop to take just 5 minutes out of every training class to talk about this issue with students.

## **Reef Safe Sunscreen**

**What should I look for in a reef safe sunscreen.**

- Made **WITHOUT** oxybenzone and/or octinoxate
- No PABA, Parabens, phthalates, oxybenzone, avobenzone, dioxane
- Look for “Biodegrades in Oceans, Lakes & Rivers”, “Non-Toxic to Sea-life”
- Reef Safe

**These products are available on Amazon.com, as well as most major retailers like Walgreens, Target, and Walmart. HOWEVER, look at the ingredients. There are some that can be very misleading.**