

Brazil: diver crippled for life after decompression illness

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A regional court in São Paulo, Brazil, has upheld the joint conviction of a diving company and an electrical energy company for a work accident suffered by a diver who lost strength in his upper limbs and the ability to move, requiring permanent use of a wheelchair.

The judgement – in Brazilian Portuguese – can be found [here](#).

What happened?

The diver was performing underwater inspection and maintenance work at a depth of 26m. On the day of the incident, the water temperature was low, and the diver was carrying tools necessary for the activity. Upon emerging from the final dive, the diver experienced symptoms of decompression sickness, with severe tingling in the abdomen. Upon reaching the surface, the diver reported feeling unwell and was taken to the hyperbaric chamber for emergency treatment. While being taken to the hyperbaric chamber the diver lost his vision and movement. Then it was discovered that the hyperbaric chamber was not working properly.

The diver was then taken for treatment, with oxygen from an improvised chamber, to another diving company, four hours drive away. Upon arrival, there was no doctor present, and the diver has to wait for about an hour for the hyperbaric chamber to be set up.

After ten hours of further hyperbaric treatment, the diver fully recovered his vision, but remained unable to move his legs and arms. Upon returning to his home, he was hospitalized for about 30 days, after which he was released for home physical therapy treatment. The court report noted that as a result of the accident, he developed severe anxiety and depression due to his physical and physiological limitations.

What went wrong?

- The company failed to comply with any diving or safety regulations.
- The company hyperbaric chamber wasn't working properly - the external pressure gauge was inoperative.
- There was no proper risk assessment or planning for an emergency scenario of this sort.
- There was no appropriate means of transporting the diver to a new emergency location – a truck had to be used.
- There was no proper emergency communication:
 - There was no doctor present at the second site.
 - The hyperbaric chamber at the second site was not ready for emergency use – the court noted that there was a “a complete lack of communication

between the company and the plaintiff's shelter.”

Lessons to learn

This is the third incident of this type in recent years that IMCA is aware of. To capture the lessons learned from these incidents, earlier in 2025, IMCA released diving recommended practice IMCA D085 Guidance on deck decompression chamber (DDC) operations for the therapeutic treatment of divers. This document provides comprehensive guidance on the operation of Deck Decompression Chambers (DDCs) for the therapeutic treatment of divers, emphasising the importance of competence, emergency planning, and adherence to safety standards.

See IMCA D085 [Guidance on deck decompression chamber \(DDC\) operations for the therapeutic treatment of divers](#)

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