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Reef Check California: Applying Scientific Rigor to Community-Based Subtidal Monitoring

Craig S. Shuman*, Cyndi Dawson, Colleen Wisniewski, Claudette Dorsey, Chris Knight and Gregor Hodgson
Reef Check Foundation

Reef Check California educates, trains, and engages all ocean users in the collection of scientifically sound data describing California's nearshore rocky reefs to help inform management decisions and create an informed constituency supportive of science-based management. The survey protocol was designed to produce data that would be comparable throughout the state and could be used to answer questions about the health of the ecosystem, the status of specific organisms – especially those targeted by fishing – and provide critical baseline information to help locate and evaluate new MPAs as directed by the California Marine Life Protection Act. Originally focused on the central coast, Reef Check California has recently expanded into northern and southern California, creating a full statewide network. Since our initial training in April 2006, we have trained over 180 certified divers ranging from commercial fishermen to high school students, helping to monitor California's nearshore coastal resources at over 40 sites from Gerstle Cove State Marine Reserve in Sonoma County to Isla Natividad, Baja California. Rigorous training and testing procedures combined with our thorough Quality Assurance/Quality Control requirements help ensure the scientific integrity of all data collected. Data that have passed QA/QC requirements are publically available and regularly submitted to the California Department of Fish and Game to assist with the management of California's nearshore marine resources.

Craig S. Shuman
Reef Check Foundation
PO Box 2057
Pacific Palisades, CA 90292
cshuman@reefcheck.org