

Traveling with underwater camera gear is always an adventure, but adding coin cells and unusual specialty batteries—especially for strobes—can complicate things. Over my 12 years of underwater photography, from cramped day boats to week-long liveboards, I've learned the hard way that proper battery handling is essential to keeping your equipment safe, functional, and flood-free. I once flooded a housing in year two due to neglecting a simple prep step, and I never forgot the lesson!

In this post, I'll share key advice on traveling with coin cells and specialty batteries for strobes, including saltwater removal before opening housings, safe handling in shared rinse tanks, maintaining dry workspaces, and having solid backup strategies. Along the way, I'll cover important concepts like separate storage, labeling battery types, and why your hard to replace remote's battery deserves extra attention.



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Understanding the Challenges of Coin Cells and Specialty Batteries

Unlike standard AA or AAA batteries, coin cells and specialized rechargeable batteries used in strobes require delicate handling. They're often very small, easy to lose, and sometimes difficult or impossible to replace while traveling, especially in remote dive locations.

- **Small Size & Fragility:** Coin cells are tiny and can short-circuit easily if not stored separately.
- **Specialty Types:** Many strobes use proprietary or uncommon battery formats, making replacement challenging.
- **Battery Contacts:** Batteries power your strobes and camera gear through precise electrical connections that must remain clean and corrosion-free.
- **Seal Risks:** Any battery-powered equipment, including underwater camera housings, relies on buttons, dials, and hinges sealed meticulously to prevent flooding.

Avoiding corrosion or electrical failures starts with thoughtful handling on land and during your dives.

Saltwater Removal Before Opening Housings: Why It Matters

After every dive, rinse your underwater camera housing with fresh water. This is standard practice, but when dealing with coin cells or strobes, there's an extra step especially important before opening any housing.

Step-by-Step: Saltwater Removal Before Opening

1. **Rinse Thoroughly:** Immerse your housing completely in fresh water, focusing on buttons, dials, and hinges where salt deposits accumulate.
2. **Use a Tiny Flashlight:** I always carry a small dedicated flashlight just for inspecting o-rings and seals for salt or debris before opening. (Highly recommend!)
3. **Dry Off Exterior:** Use a lint-free cloth to carefully dry the housing exterior, removing as much moisture as possible.
4. **Open Gently:** Slowly unscrew or unlatch the housing's back, avoiding sudden movements that could stir trapped saltwater.
5. **Check Inside:** Look for any residual moisture, especially near electrical contacts and battery compartments.
6. **Dry or Clean as Needed:** Use a clean, dry cloth or compressed air—never a wet environment or detergent—to ensure dryness.

Salt residue accelerates corrosion, which is a nightmare for electrical connections on strobes and camera controls. Taking these careful steps prevents premature damage.

Safe Handling in Shared Rinse Tanks: Protecting Batteries and Gear

Shared rinse tanks on dive boats are convenient but come with risks if you're not cautious. Wet housings banging together or batteries rolling loose can lead to physical damage or expose your gear to unnecessary saltwater.

Best Practices for Shared Rinse Tanks

- **Use Separate Storage Containers:** Always keep coin cells and specialty batteries in a dedicated hard case or sealed pouch, separate from housings and strobes.
- **Avoid Contact Between Housings:** Don't let camera housings bang together. Use padded separators or designated racks.

- **Label Battery Types Clearly:** Apply masking tape labels on battery containers indicating the type and device it belongs to (for example, “Strobe Remote CR2450”). This avoids mix-ups and mishandling.
- **Keep Batteries Dry:** Even tiny amounts of moisture inside sealed compartments can cause corrosion over time.
- **Handle Electrical Connections Gently:** Buttons, dials, and battery contacts should never be bumped forcefully during rinsing to prevent damage to seals or misaligning connectors.

By respecting these practical rules, you safeguard your batteries and your underwater photography investment.

Dry Workspace Habits to Avoid Corrosion

When changing batteries—especially tiny coin cells in delicate strobes or remote controls—always work in a clean, dry space. My years of experience have taught me that even small lapses in workspace habits lead to corrosion or operational failures.

How to Keep Your Workspace Dive-Ready

1. **Use a Dedicated Dry Mat:** A soft, water-resistant surface protects batteries from picking up dirt or moisture.
2. **Keep Tools Organized:** Have tweezers, small screwdrivers, and cleaning supplies within reach to avoid frantic handling.
3. **Label Chargers and Cables:** I always use masking tape to mark cables and chargers for strobes or remotes separately to prevent confusion.
4. **Inspect O-Rings with a Flashlight:** After opening battery compartments, use your tiny flashlight to check for invisible debris or salt grains on hinges, buttons, and seals.
5. **Avoid Contact with Hands:** Battery corrosion accelerates with skin oils and salt. Use lint-free gloves or clean hands.
6. **Store Batteries Properly Post-Change:** Place old batteries in separate containers and label their status (used, charged, etc.).

Routine care in your workspace prevents minute failures from becoming flooding disasters.

Two-Device Backups and Verification: The Ultimate Safety Net

There’s one trick I swear by: having two devices whenever possible and making backups twice over before any dive day.

Why Two Devices?

Imagine relying solely on a single strobe remote that uses a rare coin cell battery. If the battery fails far from shore, you’re in trouble. Having two strobes with independent remotes or a backup strobe remote increases your chances of a smooth dive day.

Backup & Verification Steps

1. **Charge and Test Batteries in All Devices:** Confirm that coin cells and specialty batteries have full charge and function properly before sealing the housings.
2. **Make Two Digital Backups of Photos and Settings:** Verify backups rather than assuming they worked, to avoid the dreaded “formatting cards on day one without checking” headache.

3. **Carry Spare Batteries Separately:** Make sure to store spares in separate, labeled cases and verify their charge before use.
4. **Perform Final Check with Flashlight:** Inspect electrical contacts and seals on your back-up devices one last time.
5. **Keep a Dry Notebook or Checklist:** Mark off each step in prepping your batteries and gear so nothing is skipped.

Following this methodical process reduces stress and risk dramatically.

Quick Reference Table: Battery Travel Tips for Underwater Photographers

Tip	Reason/Benefit	Action
Separate Storage for Batteries	Prevents short circuits and loss	Use labeled hard cases or pouches
Saltwater Removal Before Housing Opening	Prevents corrosion on electrical contacts	Rinse fresh water, dry, inspect with flashlight
Avoid Housing Contact in Rinse Tanks	Protects buttons/houses from banging and seal damage	Use padded separators or racks
Label Battery Types Clearly	Avoids confusion and wrong battery insertion	Masking tape with battery type/device name
Dry Workspace Practices	Prevents moisture-induced corrosion	Dedicated dry mat, gloves, organized tools
Use Two Devices and Backups	Reduces risk of complete failure	Charge/test both; double backup photos/data

Final Thoughts

Traveling with coin cells and specialty batteries for your underwater strobes can feel like juggling fragile treasures, but good habits make all the difference. Respect your batteries by labeling and storing them separately, remove saltwater carefully before opening housings, handle shared rinse tanks with care, work in dry clean environments, and never underestimate the value of backup gear and verified backups.

By integrating these practices into your daily pre-dive routine, you'll safeguard your gear's longevity and reduce the risk of the frustrating and expensive mistakes I—and many others—have faced. A well-prepared photographer is a happy photographer, ready to capture the magic beneath the waves without technical distractions.

Happy diving and shooting!