

One of the most frequent questions from underwater photographers, especially those new to using underwater camera housings, is whether it's safe to press buttons and dials while rinsing their equipment. This topic may seem simple, but as an enthusiast with 12 years of experience shooting underwater — from small day boats to multi-day liveaboards — I can share that the nuances matter. I've flooded exactly one housing in my early days and never forgot the lessons learned.

In this comprehensive guide, we'll delve into the safety of pressing housing buttons during rinsing, discuss saltwater removal strategies before opening housings, explore best practices for handling multiple housings in shared rinse tanks, and outline dry workspace habits to help avoid corrosion. Additionally, we'll highlight the importance of device backups and verification to protect your precious work.

Understanding Your Underwater Camera Housing Buttons and Dials

Your underwater camera [how to vacuum test housing](#) housing is a precision-engineered device designed to protect your camera in demanding saltwater conditions. The housing buttons, dials, hinges, and electrical connections are crafted to maintain a watertight seal, allowing you to operate your camera controls with ease underwater.

However, these mechanical and electronic controls are also points of vulnerability. Saltwater can corrode metal components and degrade seals over time. This makes understanding how to rinse and handle your housing crucial for long-term functionality.

Components to Consider:

- **Buttons and Dials:** Mechanical controls designed with O-rings or other seals to keep water out.
- **Hinges:** Often found on housing backs, these are mechanical points that can be sensitive to salt deposits.
- **Electrical Connections:** For housings with electronic controls or fiber optics, these are critical to keep dry and salt-free.

Is It Safe to Press Buttons and Dials While Rinsing?

One of the most debated practices is pressing housing buttons during rinsing to check functionality or operate the camera controls. The answer isn't a simple yes or no, but a "it depends" based on several key factors.

Factors Influencing Safety:

1. **Saltwater Presence Around Controls** Pressing buttons while the housing controls are still covered in saltwater, particularly saltwater droplets or residue, can push salt into the button assemblies. Salt crystals can accumulate and cause corrosion and mechanical sticking over time.
2. **Condition of Your Housing's Seals and O-rings** Well-maintained seals reduce the risk. If your O-rings and seals are in excellent condition and correctly greased (yes, proper grease, not just "the stuff that makes the seal"), you mitigate internal water intrusion, increasing safety when pressing buttons during rinsing.
3. **Rinse Water Quality and Temperature**



Using fresh water at moderate temperatures reduces corrosion risk, but pressing buttons underwater still risks salt trapped inside controls if not genuinely fresh rinse water.

4. **Follow Your Housing Manual Guidance** Manufacturer guidelines often indicate whether it's recommended to operate the buttons during rinsing. Ignoring these can void warranties or cause damage.

In general, the best practice is to avoid pressing buttons and dials while rinsing if saltwater residue is present around the controls. Instead, gently rinse the housing first, allow salt residue to dissolve or be flushed away with fresh water, then operate buttons if needed. This advice aligns with most housing manufacturers' manuals and expert consensus.

Removing Saltwater Before Opening Your Housing

One of the cardinal rules in underwater photography is to *never* open your housing in a salty environment or before thoroughly removing salt deposits. Saltwater inside or around the housing can cause immediate damage as it crystallizes and corrodes sensitive electronics and mechanics.

Best Practices for Saltwater Removal:

- **Pre-Rinse:** As soon as you surface, gently rinse your housing with fresh water. Avoid high-pressure sprays that could force water into the housing.
- **Inspect and Wipe:** Using a dry microfiber cloth or soft towel, carefully remove visible salt residue from buttons and dials.
- **Use Freshwater Rinse Tanks:** Immerse your housing in confirmed fresh water, either in a dedicated rinse tank or large bucket, to soak off salts.
- **Allow Drip Dry:** Place your housing in a shaded area to allow any residual freshwater to drain.

Only after these steps should you open your housing to access the camera or perform maintenance, ensuring no saltwater is inside to cause corrosion.

Safe Handling in Shared Rinse Tanks

Many dive photographers use communal rinse tanks to clean their equipment between dives or at dive resorts and boats. While convenient, there are some pitfalls:

Risks in Shared Rinse Tanks:

- **Physical Contact Damage:** If housings bang against one another, mechanical damage can occur to buttons, dials, and hinges.
- **Cross-Contamination:** Salt and sand residue can disperse in the water, making it less effective for rinsing.
- **Water Clarity:** Overused water becomes less fresh, increasing corrosion risk.

Mitigating Risks:

1. **Separate Your Housing:** Always try to place your housing gently into the rinse tank without letting it collide with others.
2. **Use Divider Nets:** If possible, use mesh bags or divider nets within rinse tanks to keep housings apart.
3. **Monitor Water Quality:** Replace rinse water frequently, especially in warm environments where microbial growth can occur.
4. **Do Not Operate Buttons Underwater in Shared Tanks:** This prevents pushing saltwater from the rinse tank into the buttons and internal mechanisms.

Personally, nothing annoys me more than seeing housings banging together in rinse tanks; the potential for damage is real and easily avoided.

Dry Workspace Habits to Avoid Corrosion

After rinsing, establishing good dry workspace habits is essential for maintaining housing integrity and ensuring your equipment's longevity.

Essential Dry Workspace Tips:

- **Dry Completely Before Opening:** Never open your housing unless you're confident it is dry and free from saltwater residue.
- **Dedicated Workspace:** Set up a clean, dry, and dust-free area — ideally with soft pads or towels to work on your housing.
- **Use a Tiny Flashlight for O-ring Inspection:** Inspect O-rings for debris or damage using a dedicated flashlight to avoid contaminants that can cause floods.
- **Label and Organize:** Label chargers, cables, and small parts with masking tape to avoid confusion and cross-contamination between devices.

Following these practices aligns with expert advice across underwater photography communities and minimizes corrosion and accidental damage.

The Importance of Two-Device Backups and Verification

Even the most careful photographer can fall victim to unforeseen equipment failures. This is why adopting robust backup practices is advisable:

Backup Strategies:

1. **Two Memory Cards:** Always shoot with two memory cards, preferably in dual card slots, backing up your images instantly.
2. **Verify Your Backup Early:** Don't annoy me by formatting your cards on day one without immediate verification — always check your backups before erasing originals.
3. **Second Device Backup:** If possible, have a second external backup device or drive with your card data stored redundantly each day.
4. **Offsite/Cloud Backup:** Upload images to cloud storage or external drives away from the dive site at earliest convenience.

These steps safeguard against flooding, electronic failures, or user error — all too common reasons photographers lose precious images.

Summary: Best Practices for Handling Housing Buttons and Dials During Rinse

Practice Details Reason Avoid pressing buttons while saltwater is present Wait until fresh water rinse has cleared salt from controls before button use Prevents salt intrusion and corrosion Follow housing manual guidance Refer to manufacturer's instructions about button operation during rinsing Maintains warranty and ensures safe operation Use fresh water and gentle rinsing Rinse with fresh water tanks or buckets, avoid high-pressure sprays Removes salt with minimal risk to seals Handle in separate compartments within rinse tanks Keep housings separated to avoid bumps and scratches Prevents mechanical damage and cross-contamination Maintain dry, clean workspace for housing maintenance Inspect O-rings, clean residual salt, and avoid dust Preserves seals and prevents flooding Maintain rigorous backup workflow Duplicate media and verify backups before formatting Protects against data loss from equipment failure

Final Thoughts

Pressing underwater camera housing buttons while rinsing is a practice with nuanced risk. While it can be safe under certain conditions, the safest routine is to avoid pressing buttons and dials until after thorough fresh water rinsing to remove salt residues. Always follow your housing manufacturer manual guidance, maintain the integrity of your seals, and use careful rinse tank protocols.



By cultivating dry workspace habits and backup strategies, you'll minimize the chance of corrosion, flooding, and data loss, ensuring your underwater photographic adventures continue without technical setbacks.

Remember, a flooded housing is an expensive lesson — learn from mine and take the extra care your gear deserves!