

## COST WORRIES OVER EU DIVE-SUIT LAWS

**WETSUIT AND** drysuit manufacturers face a raft of additional costs due to European legislation requiring extensive tests on their products. The costs can amount to £4,000 per style, and may contribute to a price hike in diving suits.

A European safety directive called CE 14225 has recently come into force, requiring all new diving suits to undergo tests for puncture, tearing, dryness and thermal properties. Suits are considered by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to be personal protective equipment, which is governed by EU standards legislation.

With manufacturers producing a wide variety of suit designs to appeal to the broad market in the UK and Europe, specialist companies such as Redcar-based Typhoon International are looking at major new costs.

David Dean, Typhoon's product manager, told *DIVE*: 'It's a very annoying cost – we've been producing suits for more than 60 years and we don't actually have to change anything in order to meet the standards.'

There is concern that some manufacturers are still not aware of the law. The diving trade association SITA has informed its members, but there are smaller players who may not know they are breaking the law. The situation has been further confused by the fact that there has been a period of grace since the rules came into force, but this is now finished.

For now, thousands of suits taken prior to the onset of legislation can be sold legitimately without the CE stamp. Also, there will be retrospective cover for styles that subsequently achieve the CE 14225 rating, but are not stamped.

*DIVE* understands that Trading Standards will not actively chase up manufacturers, but if a diving suit were to be blamed for a serious accident and then found to be an 'illegal' product, there could be serious legal repercussions – possibly even charges of corporate manslaughter.

The additional costs are likely to rebound on the paying public. 'With increased expenses in resources, labour, factory charges and oil prices, this is likely to contribute to a rise in wetsuit and drysuit prices,' an industry insider said.

## HEPCA WARNING OVER THISTLEGORM MOORING LINES

**DIVE OPERATORS** in the Egyptian Red Sea have been warned to comply with new mooring regulations on the wreck of the Thistlegorm or face prosecution.

The Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (HEPCA), which installed the mooring lines in December to protect the wreck, issued a statement to the dive community after 16 of the 32 lines were cut. However, following the installation of the lines, HEPCA has received a series of complaints from dive operators, many of whom say the system is unworkable.

Amr Ali, HEPCA's chairman, told *DIVE*: 'HEPCA has heard two kinds of complaints: firstly, that the mooring lines are too long, which means they are drifting in the current and crossing the wreck and shredding; and secondly, that the lines are too short, which means that dive guides are considering that they are in danger when repeatedly tying ropes at depth. It seems we are damned if we do, and damned if we don't.'

Ali added that HEPCA divers plan to install shorter lines to prevent them being dragged across the wreck. But he insisted that the situation was caused by 'lack of experience' among dive guides.

A series of other complaints were dismissed in an earlier letter sent to the dive community. In the letter, Ali hit back at claims that the 5m swim from the mooring lines to the wreck in the strong currents often experienced on the site was too difficult for most dive guests.

'After a considerable consultation period with operators, skippers, divers and other specialists, the current mooring system was chosen as the only viable solution,' Ali said. 'Any diver who cannot swim 5m from the rope to the wreck in a current should not be diving on this wreck. There cannot be any compromise.'

HEPCA thanked all those who have backed its Saving the Red Sea Wrecks campaign for their support. Those who support the scheme, however, say HEPCA may have to change the system so that all boats visiting the Thistlegorm can adhere to it.

A spokesperson at Sharm El Sheikh-based Camel Dive Club said: 'We are supporting HEPCA's efforts 100 per cent and believe it is doing a good job to find a solution. Of course, there are practical difficulties while everyone gets used to the new system, and adjustments may be needed before the optimal solution to the mooring issue can be found.'

'One major problem is that some dive centres/boats are not respecting the new system and are still tying on to the wreck. The system only works to conserve the wreck if everyone respects it.'

HEPCA said that although previous violations are being considered as a lack of awareness and knowledge, boat operators have been warned that legal action would be taken against all violations of the new regulations following the changes to mooring lines.

## WELCOME TO BSAC WORLD

**BSAC WORLD** will once again feature at this year's London International Dive Show, to be held at London's ExCel centre on 8/9 March. Expert BSAC divers will be on hand to answer queries and showcase the club's latest range of courses and services.

The club will also have a special stand highlighting its *Go! Diving UK* DVD, copies of which will be available free to visitors. With stunning footage of UK underwater action – including seals and basking sharks, plus wreck coverage from the South Coast and Scapa Flow – the DVD shows underwater Britain at its best.

BSAC will also be running two seminars at the show: one will explain how branches can achieve Clubmark accreditation, while the second workshop will explore methods of developing branches.

In addition to the usual stands, the show will feature various speakers. *DIVE*'s own Monty Halls will be there to promote an ambitious new shark project, while photographer Alex Mustard will be holding photo clinics.

Tickets are priced £7.50 when booked in advance or £10.50 on the door – for bookings, contact the automated hotline on 020 8977 9898.

