

Dacor Recall and Phony Tank Testing

If you took your tank for a hydrostatic testing to Underwater Adventures in Leesburg, Florida — or bought a used tank of unknown origins — you may have to do it again. The U.S. Department of Transportation, which regulates pressurized tanks, has discovered that Underwater Adventures marked and certified many tanks as properly tested when they were not. They also marked many cylinders with a Retester Identification Number (RIN) that belongs to another company.

Some of these tanks may have a compromised structural integrity and explode upon filling. Underwater Adventures failed to keep records, so it's impossible to determine the number of cylinders they improperly certified. If you have a tank marked with RIN numbers B095 or B059 and stamped with a retest date after 1986, you should not fill it until properly retested. As you might imagine, the Feds are investigating Underwater Adventures.

DACOR is recalling the 2001 Supreme SPG and SPG consoles because they may have defective metal fittings on the high-pressure hose. These may leak or become separated from the hose under normal pressure loads. The problematic hoses are black with gray lettering and horizontal gray banding along the entire length. According to Rob Cairns, vice president of sales and marketing, the problem surfaced in Europe. He says that there have been no reports of leaking or failing hoses in North America. Nonetheless, if you bought your console after February 1, 2001, return it to your nearest DACOR dealer for free inspection and hose replacement, if necessary. For more info, call DACOR at 800-323-0463 or visit their website at www.divedacor.com.

tially troubled areas.

And, I'd look for bargains. Many dive operations are offering great deals just to survive. Hotels are cutting rates as much as 50 percent. For big ticket live-aboards, I'd especially shop around, even negotiate.

I'll keep in mind that security policies will vary from airport to airport, island to island, and country to coun-

try. While rules will be stringent, some will be Draconian, enforced occasionally by self-important people who will wave their new found authority in my face. But I will relax, smile and do what they say without complaint.

As for travel insurance, I know it won't apply if I get nervous and cancel a trip. In the last year, we have

published two articles about how difficult it is to apply it to such vague notions as terrorism. And now, that we are on notice, it will be even more difficult, unless the destination to which we are headed is under attack. But I do know it will cover me if my travel agent, resort or airline file for bankruptcy.

As for *Undercurrent*, this issue was ready for print on September 11. I set it aside to consider its content. I thought, "Should I drop the Truk Lagoon story in favor of a piece on The Bahamas that I have in the hopper?" Nope, those flights to Truk go through Hawaii and Guam, airports that should be as safe as they come. What about the piece on Cuba? Well, it might be the safest haven anywhere. While the US government has been cracking down on travel by American citizens to Cuba, the enforcers probably have better things to worry about for now. So, our issue is as relevant as it can be, considering the tragic events.

I hope you can now reclaim your lives and enjoy, as best you can, the fruits of a good dive trip. Frankly, as I write this, I'm not yet ready to leave home. However, by the time you read it, I'll be laying plans for my next adventure, but with a heart still heavy. And full awareness that other shoes will surely drop.

— Ben

The State of the World's Reefs

why we divers must be concerned

A 424-page, full color, hardbound *World Atlas of Coral Reefs* was released in September by the United Nations World Conservation Monitoring Center, the leading organization to document and conserve the world's coral reefs. Here is what UNEP has to say about the state of coral reefs.

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"Our new Atlas clearly shows that

coral reefs are under assault," Klaus Toepfer, UNEP Executive Director said. "They are rapidly being degraded by human activities. They are overfished, bombed and poisoned. They are smothered by sediment, and choked by algae growing on nutrient rich sewage and fertilizer runoff. They are damaged by irresponsible tourism and are being severely stressed by the warming of the

world's oceans. Each of these pressures is bad enough in itself, but together, the cocktail is proving lethal."

"Many coral reefs are under the ownership of the world's wealthiest nations. Between them, Australia, France, the UK and the USA account for more than one quarter of the world's coral reefs — a critical

resource in powerful hands,” says Mark Spalding, lead author for the Atlas. Indonesia, followed by Australia and the Philippines are the largest reef nations, while France comes in fourth, with 14,280 sq. km. of reefs located in its overseas territories. The United States is 16th.

Coral reefs are an important source of food for hundreds of millions of people. They provide income and employment through tourism and export fisheries, and, along with countless other benefits, supply compounds for medicines. AZT, a treatment for people with HIV infections is based on chemicals extracted from a Caribbean reef sponge. More than half of all new cancer drug research focuses on marine organisms.

The most diverse region of the world for coral reefs is centered around the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea, with between 500 and 600 species of coral in each country. Unfortunately, these are also some of the most threatened coral reefs in the world. In Indonesia, 82 percent are “at risk,” threatened by such human activities as the illegal practice of blast fishing, where explosives are thrown toward the reef and the shock wave kills most of the fish and causes severe damage to its structure.

Threat and Conservation

The Atlas includes new information on the impacts of global warming and coral bleaching, including El Niño in 1998 that caused the loss of

90 percent of the corals in some parts of the Indian Ocean. Much of this damage passed almost unnoticed by the world’s policymakers. Marine scientists point out that had such levels of damage occurred in terrestrial environments, they would have caused a major public outcry. For comparison, this is equivalent to losing 90 percent of the trees in Europe in just a few months. It also provides new data on the spread of coral diseases that affect 106 types of coral in 54 countries. It shows that disease in the Caribbean has decimated entire coral reefs.

The Atlas also maps the 660 marine protected areas worldwide that incorporate coral reefs. Many are poorly managed and have little support or enforcement. It says they

World Atlas of Coral Reefs

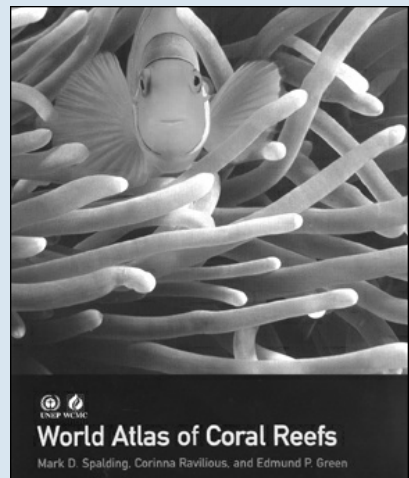
If there is one book that belongs in every traveling diver’s library, this is it. The superb *World Atlas of Coral Reefs* has everything you want to know about the reefs from Costa Rica and Cuba to the Coral Sea and Cayman. The information is specific and up to date. The photos, maps and layout are superb. And the price, for this 424-page, full color, hardbound volume, is a steal at \$45.

Clearly written with divers in mind, the Atlas is an invaluable resource for global travelers. Here’s what you’ll find:

- 94 maps, including global maps of biodiversity and reef stresses, regional maps showing 3-D bathymetry and high resolution maps showing reefs, mangroves, population centers, dive centers and protected areas.
- 280 color photographs, showing reefs, wildlife, people and places, including 84 photographs taken from space by Shuttle astronauts.
- Text explaining the formation, structure and ecology of coral reefs; their various uses and abuses at the hands of humans; and the techniques used in coral reef mapping.
- Detailed texts describing the distribution and status of coral reefs in every country.
- Data tables listing information on biodiversity, human use, and protected areas. These include statistics on coral reef area, biodiversity, fish consumption, and threats.

For example, you can learn about pollution damage to the reefs at Providenciales and the lack of human impact, as well. Or, where extensive bleaching took place in Honduras in 1998. You’ll read that Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea has the most extensive reef system in that country and where, in Fiji, the bumphead parrotfish and tridacna clams will not be found, thanks to overfishing.

This is a remarkable book. Purchase it through the *Undercurrent* website www.undercurrent.org, and our profit from the sale will go directly to the Coral Reef Alliance, a diver-based organization working hard to save the reefs. Click on books, then the photo of the World Atlas, and you’ll get it directly from Amazon.com, and CORAL will get a contribution.



often only focus on controlling the direct impacts of humans on coral reefs ignoring the more remote sources of threats to reefs, notably pollution and sedimentation from the adjacent land. "Often remote from reefs, deforestation, urban development and intensive agriculture are now producing vast quantities of sediments and pollutants that are pouring into the sea and rapidly degrading coral reefs near many shores," says Toepfer.

Economic Potential

The Atlas looks at the economic arguments for better reef management and the potential income from 15 million scuba divers worldwide. It describes a new database listing 2,500 dive centers in 91

countries.

According to Dr. J.E.N Veron, a contributor to the Atlas, "One of the saddest facts about the demise of reefs is that it is utterly nonsensical." Protecting and managing reefs is not just for the good of the fishes, in every case it also leads to economic and social benefits for local communities." Spalding added, "We now have dozens of examples from around the world of small-scale, often community led, systems for managing reefs. These have led to massive booms in productivity and some very happy local fishermen. They stand out as clear sparks of hope that we must use to teach others the message."

The International Coral Reef Action Network and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Center have joined with others to reverse the decline in coral reefs

"The growth of mass tourism, combined with the boom in the popularity of scuba diving, has brought the plight of coral reefs to public attention across the planet," says Toepfer. "Let us all now commit ourselves to the strenuous efforts needed to respond to the crisis of declining coral reefs documented in this Atlas, and to ensure that this unique ecosystem continues to feed, protect and dazzle us and our descendants for generations to come."

Reaching the Reefs of Cuba

the U.S. Government is cracking down

The U.S. government is cracking down on travel to Cuba. While American divers have been reaching Cuba on flights embarking from Canada, the Bahamas and Mexico, (at least before September 11), U.S. agents were meeting return flights and laying down the law.

One of our fearless correspondents wrote about Cuba diving (January 1999), after signing up with Scubacan, a Toronto travel agency that advertised a fully hosted, completely "legal" Cuban dive trip advertised in American dive magazines. He fudged to get around the U.S. government travel embargo and pointed out the risks Americans face when traveling to Cuba. Now one of our subscribers, whom we'll call "Johnson," reports serious problems. After hearing his story, it's understandable why Johnson prefers to remain anonymous.

Encouraged by a glossy Scubacan

brochure, Johnson booked a trip through his local dive shop on Scubacan's *Ocean Diver* live-aboard. The brochure read, in part:

"There is no law forbidding American citizens to travel to Cuba. The catch is, however, that American citizens can't spend money there. That's the current law ... Scubacan International Cuban Dive Adventures are totally prepaid, fully hosted and sponsored. You don't spend money while in Cuba. In the past, management officials have escorted hundreds of American travelers to Cuba without mishap."

Upon Johnson's return through Toronto, U.S. Customs officials asked him and his party to fill out a form listing the countries visited since their departure. Being honest citizens, and having faith in Scubacan's written assurances, they listed Cuba.

That was Johnson's first mistake,

according to Keith Bolender, who runs Scubacan. He said that when Johnson booked his trip he should have received a two-page Scubacan advisory for Americans going through customs. That advisory warns that if you declare you've been to Cuba, you're likely to be detained and questioned. The U.S. Treasury Department will then send you a questionnaire asking you to self-incriminate yourself. Johnson said he did not receive the Scubacan advisory.

A couple of months later, Johnson (and other group members) received a formal questionnaire from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and he responded.

Mistake number two, says Scubacan. The Scubacan advisory says: "Do not under any circumstance fill out this form before you call us. Once you call us, we will pro-