

Thorworld MD. John Meale, leads the call for effective Surveillance of the mat

By Thorworld Industries

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Business leader has called for effective surveillance of the Materials Handling Industry to safeguard jobs and protect workers from injury and even death.

John Meale, Vice President of Fédération Européenne de la Manutention (FEM), the European Materials Handling Federation, and Managing Director of UK-based Thorworld Industries Ltd, has said that unless regular inspections are introduced EU Directives and Regulations will continue to be undermined as counterfeit and non-compliant machinery floods the market from both inside and, more particularly, outside of the EU.

"There are 17 EU Directives and Regulations that apply to the Materials Handling Industry. These help to ensure the design and construction of safe, sustainable, energy-efficient, environmentally friendly and ergonomic materials handling equipment.

"FEM prioritises safety and has a long tradition of drafting technical recommendations, which are complementary to these Directives and Regulations and their guidelines. Most recently, FEM has worked with the EU Commission to draw up the first edition guidelines on the new EU Machinery Directive, which came into force in December 2009 and now sets stricter safety standards to help reduce accidents relating to the use of machinery.

"Adhering to these directives is law for any EU-based manufacturer, but, naturally, this comes at a cost to both the manufacturer and the customer.

"For example, my company, Thorworld Industries, manufactures a wide range of high quality materials handling equipment to increase efficiency and safety in and around the loading bay, such as dock shelters and seals, dock levellers, modular loading docks, mobile yardramps, and a variety of safety aids and accessories. We invest a considerable amount of time, expertise and, of course, money, developing appropriate technology and engineering products to the highest standards. This ensures that our products fully comply with all the EU Directives and Regulations and are safe to use and meet environmental considerations.

"However, many products are imported from countries where regulations are less stringent and whilst those destined for EU countries are legally required to meet its legislative standards, some unfortunately do not. What we therefore need is a level playing field.

"Counterfeiting – products purporting to meet the standards when they do not – is also a growing problem. These non-conforming products can be manufactured – and sold - for significantly less than their European counterparts, making them a very appealing prospect to customers. And this unfair competition is putting jobs at risk right across the UK and the rest of Europe.

"But, more importantly, many don't meet even basic health and safety requirements, endangering the lives of workers using them on a daily basis.

"Examples can be found throughout the Materials Handling Industry. There are imported mobile elevating work platforms in Ireland that don't comply with the Machinery Directive. There are tower cranes with imported girder mast elements from China, where poor welding has affected the stability or where bolts

have sheared off, posing a significant threat to workers, individuals and property in the vicinity.

"And I have seen imported ramps that aren't made from the appropriate grade of steel and don't feature the correct support structures and have therefore just buckled under the weight of a forklift truck – putting the operator at risk of serious injury or even death.

"At the moment, these breaches are only identified when something goes wrong, by which time it's too late. There has been a huge amount of legislation applicable to the Materials Handling Industry introduced over the last decade and we at FEM now feel that the time has come to focus on its implementation and proper application rather than the creation of new requirements. And this must be done through the introduction of effective surveillance and enforcement.

"Naturally, we understand this will require significant investment and a high level of expertise and training. As a result, FEM is proposing that a solution could lie in the financing and appointment of industry experts who could assist competent authorities.

"It is also important for end-users to understand that they are responsible for ensuring products they purchase comply with the regulations – if a worker is hurt due to non-compliant products the company directors could be subject to a fine or even jail. So what can they do?

"When buying a product, it is essential to not only look at whether it meets your needs but check the credentials of the company that has manufactured it. For instance, Thorworld is BSI registered with CE mark certification, it has been ISO 9001 accredited since 1992 and was one of the first in the industry to achieve the latest ISO 9001:2008 international quality management standard. As a result, as well as bearing the CE mark, all of our equipment comes with a 12 month warranty, meaning our customers can be safe in the knowledge our products are fully compliant.

"And, finally, compare the specification of the product you're looking at against standard market rates - like anything, if the deal seems too good to be true, then it probably is," concluded John Meale.

In addition to his role as Vice President of FEM, John is President of its Elevating Equipment Product Group. He is also a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (FCILT), a member of the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), a former President of the British Materials Handling Federation (BMHF), and past President of the Association of Loading & Elevating Equipment Manufacturers (ALEM).

Thorworld is firmly established as one of the foremost designers, manufacturers and suppliers to the loading bay and materials handling sectors and is recognised as both a market-leader and innovator in the provision of quality engineered equipment.

The company provides a one-stop, single source for the UK's most extensive range of high quality loading and unloading equipment, loading bay accessories and safety aids, such as: dock shelters and seals, dock levellers, modular loading docks, dock plates and boards, dock and vehicle bumpers, wheel chocks, vehicle restraints, traffic lights, wheel guides, alignment curbs and mobile loading ramps (for purchase or rental, on a sale or return basis, from the company's RentARamp® division), as well as the Truckloada® mobile loading platform and the Dockloada® scissor lift platform

For more information about Thorworld's market-leading loading and unloading equipment, and to obtain a copy of their latest Product Range Catalogue, contact: Thorworld Industries Ltd, Station Lane Industrial Estate, Old Whittington, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S41 9QX. Tel: 01246 260981. Fax: 01246 260493.

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