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Second Report from the Commission to the Council on the
Action Programme of the European Communities on
Safety and Health at Work

(Financial years 1980 - 1981)

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EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Subject : 2nd report from the Commission to the Council on the action programme of the European Communities on safety and health at work.

The action programme of the European Communities on safety and health at work, which has been the subject of a Council resolution of 29 June 1978, contains an invitation to the Commission to submit an annual report on the progress made in implementing this programme.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

I. The Action Programme

- A. Industrial accident and occupational disease aetiology Research.
- B. Protection against dangerous substances.
- C. Prevention of the dangers and harmful effects of machines.
- D. Monitoring and inspection. Improvement of human attitudes.

II. Implementation of the action programme.

III. Future of the action programme.

Introduction

This is the second report on the implementation of the Action Programme of the European Communities on Safety and Health at Work. (Council Resolution of 29 June 1978, O.J. C 165 of 11 July 1978).

The first report (*) gave a broad outline of the objectives of and action to be taken in connection with the programme and described the first steps taken in the field of safety and health at work.

It is not necessary to repeat these general points and we shall restrict ourselves here to what has been achieved in the time between the two reports despite the lack of money which did, in many cases, slow down the progress of the programme.

The action programme started immediately after it had been accepted by the Council with the implementation of measures to protect people against dangerous substances (Actions 3-7). It was only later, particularly during the financial year under review, that it was possible to tackle further work more specifically related to safety at work.

I. The Action Programme

This report follows the order of the actions listed in the programme.

A. Industrial accident and occupational disease aetiology research

Actions 1 and 2

In view of the shortage of staff at the Statistical Office of the European Communities, it has not yet really been possible to begin compiling Community statistics on industrial accidents for all branches of activity.

However, considerable progress has been recorded in three branches - building, agriculture and sea fishing.

In the case of the building industry, analysis of the causes of accidents has shown that falls are largely responsible and that working conditions are of great importance.

The results of surveys in the agricultural sector are still too fragmentary to be used as a basis for preventive measures. It nevertheless appears that there are a considerable number of falls, particularly from agricultural machinery. The basis for cooperation established with the Working Party on Health and Safety of the Joint Committee on the Social Problems of Agricultural Workers should mean that considerable progress will be made from now on.

*) Com(80) 32 final

The Joint Committee responsible for the social problems associated with sea fishing has for many years been systematically recording the circumstances under which accidents occur. Analysis of the information forms has just started in close collaboration with this committee.

The survey of the causes of serious accidents in the iron and steel industry launched in two industrial areas in the Community has continued and, in the case of one area, has been completed. The results show clearly how useful these surveys are for the organization of preventive measures. Contact has been made with institutes specializing in occupational safety which already carry out surveys of this kind at national level, with a view to making use of existing data on a Community basis; these will be a better guide for the organization of measures to prevent accidents than traditional general statistics. The advantage of these surveys is that they show the industrial sectors at risk objectively and quantitatively.

Research. Two preparatory studies on the building industry were carried out in 1981.

The first covered falls in this industry. The second was more general, the aim being to assess working conditions.

The Commission has looked into these studies and the preparations of the Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work and is drawing up a research programme on the building industry.

In the longer term, but with the same objectives in mind, preparations are being made for a more general research programme on all industrial branches. A study on this, entitled 'Scientific and technical basis for a Community research programme on safety and health at work', is about to be completed.

B. Protection against dangerous substances

In connection with action in this field, the Council has adopted the following two directives.

1. Council Directive of 27 November 1980 on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to chemical, physical and biological agents at work (*).

This Directive covers all chemical, physical and biological agents used in industry and includes both short- and long-term measures.

The short-term measures are information for workers and appropriate monitoring of their health.

*) Official Journal L 327 of 3 December 1980

In the long term, the Member States must take technical measures to ensure that the exposure of workers to agents is avoided or kept at as low a level as is reasonably practicable; provision is made for 14 measures, plus five additional measures for the 11 agents in the Annex.

The Directive also states that individual proposals for directives will be submitted by the Commission to the Council for these 11 agents.

With this in view, two proposals for directives on lead (*) and asbestos (**) were submitted in 1979 and 1980 (Action 5); priority is now being given to the remaining agents: acrylonitrile, arsenic, benzene, cadmium, mercury, nickel, chloroform, paradichlorobenzene and carbon tetrachloride.

On 28 July 1982, having considered the opinions of the European Parliament (***) and the Economic and Social Committee (****), the Council adopted the Directive on the protection of workers from harmful exposure to metallic lead and its ionic compounds at work (first individual directive under the terms of Article 8 of Directive 80/1107/EEC) (*****).

2. Council Directive on the major-accident hazards of certain industrial activities (*****)

This Council Directive of 24 June 1982 relates both to the action programme on the environment and to the action programme on safety and health at work.

The main aim of the Directive is to prevent the major accidents which could be caused by certain industrial activities and to limit their effects on the environment.

The Directive establishes a system for the control of industrial activities involving dangerous substances in quantities exceeding certain limits by requiring the manufacturer to submit to the competent authorities a notification, the form and content of which are fixed.

As regards the site and the persons working on the site, the Directive obliges manufacturers to provide such persons with information, training and equipment in order to ensure their safety. In addition, for more dangerous industrial activities the manufacturer must prepare emergency plans, including the provision of safety equipment, alarm systems and resources available for use inside the establishment.

Member States are required to inform the Commission of major accidents and of the name of the organization which might have relevant information on such accidents and which is able to advise the competent authorities of the other Member States which have to intervene in the event of such an accident. The Commission is to set up a register containing a summary

*) O.J. C 324 of 28.12.1979

**) O.J. C 262 of 9.10.1980

***) O.J. C 101 of 4.5.1981, p.14

****) O.J. C 300 of 18.11.1980, p.22

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of the major accidents which have occurred within the territory of the Member States, including an analysis of the causes of such accidents, experience gained and measures taken, to enable the Member States to use this information for prevention purposes.

Action 4

A working document with information which could be used for a Community policy on carcinogenic substances at the workplace has been drawn up and is now being examined by the Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work.

Dangers of microwave radiation

In connection with the protection of workers against physical agents, the Commission submitted to the Council on 26 June 1980 a Proposal for a Directive (*) laying down basic standards for the health protection of workers and the general public against the dangers of microwave radiation.

C. Prevention of the dangers and harmful effects of machines

Action 8 - Noise and vibrations

Several studies have been made of the correlation between the risk of hearing damage and exposure to noise, the problems of industrial audiometry and the hearing risks due to fluctuating and impulse noise. Another is in progress on the problem of the labelling of noisy equipment used at work.

The Commission departments are drawing up a Proposal for a directive on the protection of workers against the risks of exposure to noise. The necessary consultations are in progress.

A study on the health effects of vibrations at work is nearing completion.

Action 9

Two studies (**) have been undertaken to compare various aspects of the application of the principles of accident prevention in the design, construction and use of industrial equipment. The results will be available during 1982 and will complement those quoted under Action 1. One proposal is to establish specifications for certain types of agricultural equipment or plant.

A two-part programme on the epidemiology of respiratory diseases in agriculture is reaching completion. A study conducted in eight Community countries on the risks to which agricultural workers are exposed has shown that the data available and the way in which they are interpreted vary considerably and this may give a false impression of the risk factors where health is concerned.

*) Official Journal C 249 of 26 September 1980.

**) -Comparative study of national procedures for the approval of machines for safety purposes
-Comparative study of the regulations in the Community countries on occupational safety and the inclusion of safety considerations in the various stages of design, production and use.

A field study to assess the health of groups of rural workers has been conducted in two countries.

It is hoped that these studies will make a useful contribution to the work in progress to improve statistical methodology (cf. Action 1).

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Ergonomics

For many years the Commission has been doing considerable work in the field of ergonomics with its sponsorship of ECSC research projects.

Although this work covers the coal and steel industries, there are aspects of it which could be applied more generally.

Examples are items such as the following :

- the adaptation of data processing to new technology; the adaptation of microprocessors to office work;
- the handling of heavy loads. This could be adapted specifically to building and agriculture;
- cooling of a hot environment. This information is applicable to all hot workplaces, e.g. in the glass-making industry;
- the use of individual protective devices;
- research into the physiological stress associated with the work.

It should be noted that in 1981 the Commission conducted a series of studies in connection with ergonomics:

- the possible contribution of ergonomics to the design of monitoring and warning systems in processing industries such as the petrochemical industry;
- the problems associated with the display of information on a cathode-ray screen;
- ways in which ergonomics can help to ensure safe and healthy environments and working conditions where new technology has been applied to existing installations;
- assessment of the ergonomic stress associated with unavoidable additional tasks resulting from the introduction of remote control and robots into industrial technology;
- functional assessment of the disabled in relation to the tasks created by new auxiliary microelectronic systems.

D. Monitoring and inspection - improvement of human attitudes

Action 12 - Special monitoring

Because of the extended use of subcontracting in industry for maintenance and repairs for example, and in building and construction, it has become urgent and necessary to compare national provisions for the monitoring of the workers involved.

An initial meeting on the subject was held in 1981 and a Community study (*) on subcontracting which had been completed was used.

Action 13 - Organization of inspection

Following a meeting of national experts it was decided that in 1982 a colloquium should be organized on the part to be played by the works inspector in the improvement of safety. Preparatory work for this colloquium began in 1981. The Commission hopes to learn something from experience at national level and regards works inspection as being of prime importance if a high level of safety is to be achieved.

During a course for works inspectors in Denmark (Jørlunde) in 1981, the need for more coordination between Member States on dangerous substances was discussed.

It is up to the Commission to take action to avoid the adoption of incompatible national systems.

Action 14 - Training and information on safety

A seminar was held in April 1980 for experts from the Community countries to compare university health and safety teaching programmes and methods.

The aim of this colloquium was also to exchange information on the objectives and contents of courses on safety training. It brought to light the high degree of similarity of the subjects taught and the impact of national legislation on what was taught.

Two aspects emerged: the need to train both the specialists required by firms and the teachers and members of the inspectorates.

Work in this important sector is continuing and a study of the technical and practical aspects of safety training in universities etc., has been completed.

The data from this study will serve as a basis for the colloquium in 1982 the aim being to establish the action the Commission should take in this field. The main purpose is to define guidelines for safety training at university level.

*) collaboration between a main undertaking
(contractor) and secondary firms (sub-contractors)

II. Implementation of the Action Programme

As indicated in the first report there is constant cooperation in the implementation of the action programme between the Commission and the Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work and its working parties. The three working parties have been maintained.

III. The future of the Action Programme

The council Resolution of 29 June 1978 on the Action Programme of the European Communities on Safety and Health at Work expresses "the political will to take, in the keeping with the urgency of the matter and bearing in mind what is feasible at national and Community level, the measures required so that between now and the end of 1982 the following actions in particular can be undertaken".

After the first report on the Action Programme, and particularly during 1981, the Commission embarked upon a number of actions which had previously not been possible.

Specific examples are activities under the heading, Industrial accident and occupational disease aetiology - Research (Actions 1 and 2), Prevention of the dangers and harmful effects of machines (Actions 8 and 9) and Monitoring and inspection - improvement of human attitudes (Actions 12, 13 and 14).

The resources have not however, always been available to implement and complete all the work and some to these activities have only just started.

The Commission intends to continue these and adapt them to industrial requirements on the basis of a second action programme for 1983 following on from the first.