

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(80) 32 final

Brussels, 1st February 1980

FIRST REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL
ON THE ACTION PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
ON SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the programme

The Council resolution of 29 June 1978 on an action programme of the European Communities on Safety and Health at Work (OJ C165 of 11.7.1978) invites the Commission to submit an annual report on the progress made in implementing this resolution.

This action programme figures among a range of important and somewhat similar activities which are currently being undertaken by the Commission. The various actions are based on a total programme which directly concerns the life and working conditions of workers, whilst at the same time dealing with aspects of the social infrastructure of our society. Thus the physical and social interests of more than 100 million workers will be covered by this action programme.

The programme finds its place among a range of measures that are required by today's industrial society. Such society brings with it both benefits as well as risks, and these risks bear both upon people working in factories and workplaces as well as those in areas outside. In today's world, the population in general is becoming more aware of these direct and indirect dangers. It is the task of those who are responsible to recognize this complex of problems and to take action to diminish risks to the minimum by increasing worker safety and health such that the dignity of man at work is maintained and improved.

Modern developments in today's industrial society in the technical area and in the production process require constant supervision, and sometimes involve the implementation of strict measures which themselves involve workers.

These elements, and others like them, form the basis of the action programme which in itself reflects one of the important concerns of the Commission - namely to contribute to the well-being of man at work as part of the socio-economic structure of the Economic Community.

This first report is concerned with giving an overall view. It begins by presenting a brief summary of the Community's Action Programme on Safety and Health at Work, then goes on to discuss the implementation of that programme. The report seeks to give a picture of the work that has been undertaken, but it does not cover all details of the work that has been carried out in the past year. There are many studies and working groups, whose efforts are only now coming to fruition and from which conclusions still have to be drawn.

The report concentrates primarily on activities which have already led or are about to lead to proposals or drafts by the Commission to the Council, in the form of directives, decisions, or resolutions.

It is important to stress that the many actions undertaken within the framework of the Coal and Steel and the Euratom treaties and also aimed at increasing the safety and health at work are not covered by this report.

One of the most important proposals that has been sent to the Council concerns a "Proposal for a Council Directive on the protection of workers from harmful exposure to chemical, physical and biological agents at work" (OJ C89 of 5.4.1979). This proposal was submitted to the Council on 6 March 1979 and was considered by the first working group of experts of the Council on 19 June 1979.

It is clear that although much has been achieved in the past year, there is still a lot that needs to be performed in the future. It has not been possible to achieve all that was hoped for in the first year, principally because of a shortage of manpower. Despite this shortage, with the support of the Council, the Parliament, and the Economic and Social Committee, the programme has resulted in several important initiatives being taken in the field of safety and health at work. However the fulfilment of this programme in an adequate fashion between now and 1982 can only be assured by the correction of this manpower shortage.

Actions to be undertaken

In its resolution the Council agreed that the following actions could be undertaken up to the end of 1982:

Accident and disease aetiology connected with work - Research.

1. Establish, in collaboration with the Statistical Office of the European Communities, a common statistical methodology in order to assess with sufficient accuracy the frequency, gravity and causes of accidents at work, and also the mortality, sickness and absenteeism rates in the case of diseases connected with work.
2. Promote the exchange of knowledge, establish the conditions for close cooperation between research institutes and identify the subjects for research to be worked on jointly.

Protection against dangerous substances.

3. Standardize the terminology and concepts relating to exposure limits for toxic substances. Harmonize the exposure limits for a certain number of substances, taking into account the exposure limits already in existence.
4. Develop a preventive and protective action for substances recognized as being carcinogenic, by fixing exposure limits, sampling requirements and measuring methods, and satisfactory conditions of hygiene at the work place, and by specifying prohibitions where necessary.
5. Establish, for certain specific toxic substances such as asbestos, arsenic, cadmium, lead and chlorinated solvents, exposure limits, limit values for human biological indicators, sampling requirements and measuring methods, and satisfactory conditions of hygiene at the workplace.

6. Establish a common methodology for the assessment of the health risks connected with the physical, chemical and biological agents present at the workplace, in particular by research into criteria of harmfulness and by determining the reference values from which to obtain exposure limits.
7. Establish information notices on the risks relating to and hand-books on the handling of a certain number of dangerous substances such as pesticides, herbicides, carcinogenic substances, asbestos, arsenic, lead, mercury, cadmium and chlorinated solvents.

Prevention of the dangers and harmful effects of machines,

8. Establish the limit levels for noise and vibrations at the workplace and determine practical ways and means of protecting workers and reducing sound levels at places of work. Establish the permissible sound levels of building-site equipment and other machines.
9. Undertake a joint study of the application of the principles of accident prevention and of ergonomics in the design, construction and utilization of the plant and machinery, and promote this application in certain pilot sectors, including agriculture.
10. Analyse the provisions and measures governing the monitoring of the effectiveness of safety and protection arrangements and organize an exchange of experience in this field.

Monitoring and inspection - improvement of human attitudes

11. Develop a common methodology for monitoring both pollutant concentrations and the measurement of environmental conditions at places of work; carry out intercomparison programmes and establish reference methods for the determination of the most important pollutants. Promote new monitoring and measuring methods for the assessment of individual exposure, in particular through the application of sensitive biological indicators. Special attention will be given to the monitoring of exposure in the case of women, especially of expectant mothers, and adolescents. Undertake a joint study of the principles and methods of application of industrial medicine with a view to promoting better protection of workers' health.
12. Establish the principles and criteria applicable to the special monitoring relating to assistance or rescue teams in the event of accident or disaster, maintenance and repair teams and the isolated worker.
13. Exchange experience concerning the principles and methods of organization of inspection by public authorities in the fields of safety, hygiene at work and occupational medicine.
14. Draw up outline schemes at a Community level for introducing and providing information on safety and hygiene matters at the workplace to particular categories of workers such as migrant workers, newly recruited workers and workers who have changed jobs.

Implementation of the action programme

1. Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work

Since it is essential to encourage the increasing participation of management and labour in the decisions and initiatives in the field of safety, hygiene and health protection at work at all levels, particularly at the level of the undertaking, the Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work, set up by Council Decision 74/325/EEC of 27 June 1974 (OJ No. L185 of 9.7.1974) has been closely associated with this work. The Council has appointed the members and alternate members of this Committee in its Decision 78/1014/EEC of 23 November 1978 (OJ No. L349 of 13.12.1978) for the period from 23 November 1978 to 22 November 1981.

In order to adapt its structure to the Community action programme, the Committee extended the terms of reference of its three working parties, giving them the following titles:

Working Party I	"Technical Preventive Measures and Regulations Relating to Health and Safety at Work"
Working Party II	"Statistics and Research"
Working Party III	"Role of Both Sides of Industry, Problems of Training and Information".

For the purpose of liaison and cooperation with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the Committee invited an observer from this organization to attend its meetings.

The Commission has, during the past year, received much welcome advice from the Committee, and this cooperation will continue in the application of this Programme of Action.

2. Work on Individual Actions.

Action 1. Statistics. The only Community statistics on accidents at work which currently exist are those concerned with coal and steel. The Commission has been unable to develop adequately these statistics for other areas due to a lack of manpower. Nevertheless studies are currently underway relating to the construction industry and an in depth sectorial survey is also being conducted in the steel industry. A detailed analysis of these results will be carried out in 1980 so that the major factors involved in accidents can be identified with a view to developing appropriate preventive measures.

As regards other statistics relating to mortality sickness and absenteeism, the Commission is similarly limited by the manpower shortages.

Action 2. Research. The research programmes in the coal and steel industry are continuing, and the Commission is using the approaches adopted in this area as a model for defining an approach to research policy in the field of safety and health at work for the other sectors of the economy, as well as identifying suitable subjects for research. This work is being pursued further together with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. It is anticipated that a framework research programme will be elaborated in 1981.

The Commission has also launched a feasibility study concerned with a documentation system for all research projects and research in progress in the field of occupational health.

Action 3. Concepts, terminology and exposure limits. A study has already been completed entitled "Comparative analysis of the principles and application of control limits in the Member States of the European Community". This study shows the wide differences in terminology and concepts currently existing between Member States regarding exposure limits, and that these concepts are in a state of continual development. Meetings of national experts have already been held to discuss this study and it is planned to hold further meetings to finalize it, and to provide elements for the harmonization which is urgently needed at Community level.

This work is being conducted in close cooperation with ILO and WHO, but it is obvious that for the Member States there is an urgent need to achieve common agreement on the words used, and to define as closely as possible the different terms in national regulations which often do not cover the same things.

Action 4. Carcinogens. The Commission is drawing up a policy of specific action on the carcinogens. To this effect it considers that a general Directive dealing with the principles of prevention and protection will be appropriate; this will be proposed in the near future.

This policy will take into account the International Labour Conference Convention No. 139 and Recommendation No. 147 concerning prevention and control of occupational hazards caused by carcinogenic substances and agents. In addition the Commission will continue its active collaboration with the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

A Directive dealing with a carcinogen has already been accepted. This is the Council Directive on the approximation of Member States' laws, regulations and administrative provisions on the health of workers exposed to vinyl chloride monomer (OJ L 197 of 22.7.1978).

Action 5. Specific toxic substances. The Commission has sent to the Council a proposal for a Council Directive on the protection of workers from harmful exposure to chemical, physical and biological agents at work (OJ C 89 of 5.4.1979) on which discussions by a working group of the Council began in June.

The objective of this Directive is the protection of workers who are or who are likely to be exposed at work to risks to their health and safety arising from chemical, physical and biological agents, including the prevention of such risks through elimination or limitation of the exposure of the workers concerned to these agents.

This Directive, which will affect the majority of the workers in the Community, requires that Member States enact framework legislation which will ensure that exposure of workers to agents shall be kept as low as can be reasonably achieved. Such legislation shall include the possibility of:

- introducing prevention at the technical level;
- establishing exposure limit values not to be exceeded as well as sampling procedures and measuring methods;
- introducing collective and personal protection measures;
- setting hygiene requirements;
- providing information for workers on the potential risks to which they are exposed, and the technical preventive measures taken;
- setting requirements for the precautions to be taken by the employer and the worker;
- introducing the use of warning and safety signs;
- requiring medical surveillance;
- keeping updated records of exposure levels, lists of workers exposed to agents and medical records;
- introducing emergency procedures for abnormal exposures.

The Commission further proposed that:

- workers and/or their representatives shall be involved with the elaboration and application of the above provisions;
- a worker shall not suffer undue prejudice from these provisions, in particular if there is the need to remove him from exposure to any of the agents;
- the application of these provisions should not lead to undue effects outside the workplace, such as increase in pollution levels.

The Commission recognized that for a certain number of agents further specific proposals for Directives would be required. The following additional measures are to apply to these agents:

- health surveillance should begin prior to exposure, continue periodically during exposure and also take place following the end of exposure;
- workers shall be provided with the results of exposure measurements and where appropriate with the results of group biological tests of exposure; similarly individual workers shall have access, where appropriate, to the results of their own biological tests of exposure. In order to assist them with the interpretation of the results and to further inform them of the potential hazards of the agents specifically prepared information and documentation at national and/or Community levels shall be made available.

Finally, in this proposal for a directive the Commission recognized that a number of the provisions are of a technical or scientific nature which will in the future require further elaboration and adaptation to technical and scientific progress. The Commission therefore proposed the setting up of a Technical Committee called "The Industrial Medicine and Hygiene Committee" which would function according to well established rules and would have competence for all these technical matters.

With regard to the specific proposals for Directives, the Commission has just submitted to the Council a proposal on lead; a proposal on asbestos will follow.

Action 6. Assessment of risks. A number of criteria studies (dose/effect relationships) have already been performed and published. These include lead, asbestos, cadmium and organophosphorus pesticides. These studies have complemented the work of WHO, ILO and other international bodies who have also performed similar work thus obviating the need for Member States to perform similar exercises and resulting in an economy of effort. The results of these studies have already been used by the Commission in evaluating the risks to human health due to exposure and thus provide the necessary elements for legal instruments which are to be subsequently submitted to the Council.

Action 7. Information notices. The Commission considers that the Council Directive of 25 July 1977 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to the provision of safety signs at places of work (OJ No. L229 of 7.9.1977) is an important step in having a common basis for the information of workers concerning the dangers and the necessary safety precautions at the workplace. The Commission has already held meetings of the Committee concerned with amendments to technical progress and to future developments in international methods regarding signs. An adaptation to this Directive has already been made, taking into account the viewpoint of the Advisory Committee in the Commission Directive of 21 June 1979 amending the Annexes (OJ No. L183 of 19.7.1979).

Work has already begun on the preparation of information notices and a first draft has been prepared on lead. It will shortly be submitted for opinion to the Advisory Committee. The Commission intends to use the criteria (dose/effect relationships) documents already published on asbestos (EUR 5653e) and cadmium (EUR 5697) as background documents for the preparation of information notices on these agents.

Action 8. Noise and vibrations. On the subject of noise the Commission has already published a report on "Damage and annoyance caused by noise" EUR 5398. The Commission intends to use this document as one of the background elements in drawing up a proposal on limitation of noise at work.

Action 9. Accident prevention, ergonomics. The majority of the work in this area has been carried out in the coal and steel sector. In the coal and steel industries, the Commission has established the principles for accident prevention which takes into account the concept of integrated safety. Ergonomic research is being carried out not only at the workplace but also in national institutes, which will thus lead to a significant improvement in the safety and quality of life at the workplace. The Commission is currently studying how similar principles can be applied to the construction industry and to the agricultural sector.

Action 10. Monitoring of safety and protection. The Commission has already instituted studies concerned with toxicovigilance systems. It is anticipated that systems of this nature will give an early warning of new and previously unknown hazards to man's health and safety at work. With regard to the dissemination of information concerning such newly identified hazards, a workshop was held by the Commission in conjunction with ILO on a hazard alert system. The aim of this system is to pass information about newly discovered hazards in the workplace, and how to protect against them rapidly through an international network of collaborating centres.

Action 11. Intercomparison programmes, biological monitoring, industrial medicine. Within the framework of the Council Directive on biological screening of the population for lead (OJ No. L105 of 28.4.1977) the Commission has already carried out work involved with the quality assurance of lead measurements, which it is intended to develop for the work situation.

The Commission is in the process of publishing a series of monographs on biological monitoring. These monographs are intended as up to date reviews of the available data on a number of pollutants with a view to indicating the possibilities of carrying out biological monitoring.

A study has been completed by the Commission on occupational medical services, and a first meeting of experts held. It is anticipated that further meetings will be necessary to formulate clear proposals.

Action 12. Special Monitoring. In the last decade a significant number of chemical accidents, which may be considered as major accidents, have occurred both within the Community and in other countries.

The Flixborough, Seveso and Manfredonia accidents in the past five years have finally prompted not only the Member States but also the Community to act.

The proposal for a Council Directive on the risk of major accidents in certain industrial activities (OJ C 212 of 24.8.1979) is aimed at preventing such accidents and at reducing their consequences when they occur.

A major accident is defined as:

A major emission, fire or explosion involving one or more dangerous substances, resulting from the uncontrolled development of an industrial activity, which could constitute a serious risk, immediate or delayed, for workers, the neighbouring population and the environment.

The proposal requires, in general, for industrial activities, or storage which involve dangerous substances, and which are likely to lead to serious consequences in the case of an accident, that:

- a safety report be drawn up,
- workers be informed, equipped and trained,
- safety drills be organized,
- the neighbouring population be informed and an emergency plan established.

In addition when certain particularly toxic, persistent exploding or flammable substances are present in quantities exceeding certain limits then notification with a more substantial dossier is compulsory. Such a dossier is also necessary if the substances fall within certain criteria of toxicity.

Member States are to inform immediately the Commission of any major accidents occurring on their territory; the Commission is to set up a data bank which will contain information:

- on the major accidents which have occurred;
- on the risks of major accidents considered by type of industrial activity;
- on the hazards which might arise in the case of major accidents;
- on the appropriate measures for reducing the risks.

Action 13. Inspection by public authorities. The Commission is planning a joint study together with the International Labour Office and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

Action 14. Schemes for information to particular categories of workers. This action has not been developed in view of the manpower shortage.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the very modest staff means available to the Commission for the implementation of this action programme, several important initiatives have been undertaken, and a number of detailed proposals have been submitted to the Council. The approval of these proposals by the Council will help to achieve a better and more harmonized protection of the safety and health of workers at Community level.