

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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ROAD SAFETY: A PRIORITY FOR THE COMMUNITY

(Communication from the Commission)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Almost fifty thousand people die each year on Community roads, another 1,6 million are injured. The Commission is convinced that the common transport policy should aim at reducing these numbers - as part of its overall transport safety policy - and has target road safety as major priority. Its current work in helping to create and spread across the Community, safety rules and standards which affect road users, vehicles and infrastructure, was given prominence during the 1986 European Road Safety Year.

2. Road Safety Year was strongly supported by the European Parliament in two resolutions.

Despite even only limited financial means, the 1986 European Road Safety Year was able to coordinate efforts by governments and private bodies in carrying out extensive action in the field of legislation and publicity.

The Commission pointed out in its Communication which provided an evaluation of European Road Safety Year 1986, this year should be considered a starting point for a continuous coordinated effort to improve Road Safety in the Community.

3. Statistics on road accidents during the last three years (see below) show a slight improvement for 1987 but a significant increase of fatalities for the first half of 1988, which indicates the importance of continuing and emphasizing action on road safety.

	Injury accidents	Killed	Injured	
1986	1.308.920	50.000	1.596.684	EUR 12
1987	1.299.757	48.232	1.579.200	EUR 12
Evolution 87/86	- 1 %	- 4 %	- 1 %	
Evolution 88/87 provisional data	+ 8 %	+ 9 %	+ 9 %	

4. This Communication takes one stage further the Commission's work in the field of road safety. It provides an overview of the achievements of the last few years and of on-going activities in the field. It also announces the submission to the Council of three additional draft proposals for Directives in the field of road users behaviour concerning driving licence qualifications, speed limits, and drink and driving.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS

5. On 21 June 1988 the Council adopted Directive 88/449/EEC prescribing roadworthiness tests every two years for all commercial vehicles below 3,5 tonnes. The testing would begin four years after the registration of the vehicle. This Directive extends the scope of Directive 77/143/EEC which regulates annual roadworthiness tests for other commercial vehicles.

6. In the framework of technical prescriptions for new vehicles, a large number of Directives have been adopted which all have a positive impact on the technical condition of vehicles in the Community and consequently on road safety. A number of important Directives have been adopted recently.

. Directive 88/194/EEC, introduced the compulsory fitting of Antilock Braking Systems on all vehicles above 16 tonnes, all coaches above 12 tonnes and all trailers above 10 tonnes as from 1991. The implementation of these systems improves the safety and stability at braking of heavy vehicles and buses.

. Directive 88/321/EEC, introducing the compulsory fitting of additional wide angle and close proximity rear-view mirrors for all vehicles above 7,5 tonnes as from 1 October 1990. The implementation of the mirrors will help to prevent accidents to cyclists or other road users who often cannot be seen by the drivers of large vehicles when turning. The rapid adoption of this Directive came about as a result of an intensive campaign by a Danish mother whose daughter was killed in such an accident and Danish Cyclist Federation.

III. ON THE TABLE OF THE COUNCIL

7. A number of other important initiatives have been proposed by the Commission and one awaiting decisions by the Council of Transport Ministers.

8. The Council still has to decide on the compulsory roadworthiness testing of private cars (COM(86)214). The Commission proposal provides for test periodicity as follows ; first test 3 years after registration, next test two years later, followed by annual tests.

In this context the Commission will shortly submit a proposal to the Council in order to lay down standard procedures and criteria for the tests.

9. The Commission has proposed a Directive (COM(87)407) setting the minimum tread depth of tyres of private cars at 1,6 mm. This measure will improve the skid resistance of vehicles when braking on wet surfaces.

10. Proposals concerning side guards for heavy goods vehicles are already largely agreed and a proposal on spray suppression devices for trucks and their trailers (COM(87)132) awaits decision.

In order to minimize the risk to unprotected road users, (i.e. pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists) of getting caught under the wheels of big and heavy goods vehicles, the Commission has put forward a Directive requiring that, as far as practicable, sides of goods vehicles are built or equipped with continuous surfaces or rails.

The other proposed Directive requires the installation of devices to reduce the effects of clouds of splash and spray coming from all the wheels of trucks and their trailers running on a wet road. This is dangerous for the vehicles behind for those overtaking, who may have to drive through walls of water which rob them of all visibility.

11. In the field of road users' behaviour an important issue in reducing the consequence of accidents is the use of safety belts. The Commission has recently submitted a proposal to the Council on the compulsory use of safety belts in the front and back seats of vehicles lighter than 3,5 tonnes (COM(88)544). For private cars the proposal provides for the use of belts immediately for front seats for those cars registered after 1979, and use in back seats from 1.1.1993 for those cars registered after 1.1.1989. This proposal has yet to be discussed by Ministers.

IV. NEW INITIATIVES

12. In order to complete a package on road safety measures, the Commission is now submitting to the Transport Council, three proposals for Directives on key-issues in drivers' behaviour ; qualifications for driving licenses, speed limits and drink and driving.

13. The existing Directive on driving licenses (First Directive on the introduction of a Community driving licence) (1), provides for the adoption by the Council, at a later date, of final provisions concerning vehicle categories. It also provides for more extensive harmonization of standards, as soon as possible, as regards the tests which applicants must undergo.

It is thus to fulfil those commitments that the Commission is now submitting to the Council a proposal for a new Directive on driving licenses which will replace Directive 80/1263/EEC. This new Directive establishes, with a concern for road safety, the second stage of a more intensive harmonization on standards for driving tests and medical requirements as well as on categories of vehicles and ages. In the framework of "Europe Citizens" and of free movements of persons, the new Directive also provides for the mutual recognition of licences and removes the obligation to exchange licenses for those who transfer their residence from one Member State to another.

14. Alcohol continues to play a significant role in increasing the risks of road accidents. In cases of fatal accidents involving adults, between one third and one half of drivers have been found to have a significant (even if legal) level of alcohol. Research findings indicate that drivers' reaction time increases and their ability to process information decreases where their blood alcohol concentration is as little as 0,50 mg/ml. From 0,50 mg/ml to 0,80 mg/ml, the accident risk therefore increases.

(1) 80/1263/EEC of 4.12.1980.

Given that Member States have differing legislations concerning the maximum permitted level of alcohol in a driver's blood and with the aim of reducing the problem of alcohol and driving within the Community, the Commission is now submitting to the Council a proposal for a Directive which provides for a harmonized Community limit of 0,50 mg/ml from 1.1.1993.

15. In its Communication to the Council on speed limits in January 1987 (COM(86)735), the Commission concluded that the Community should adopt a Directive to set legally enforceable speed limits, taking into account a number of considerations including road safety, environmental nuisance, energy consumption, as well as industrial and transport-sector costs and benefits.

A proposal along these lines covering commercial vehicles and buses has now been submitted to the Council.

16. Further to the above Commission initiatives on legislation, road safety demands a continuous research effort in order to evaluate and analyze the situation as well as to get the technical basis for new actions.

In this respect, the Commission is now working on the creation of a Community-wide data base on road accidents so as to identify and quantify the situation and trends on road safety and to provide a valuable tool for further research.

17. In the field of research, particular reference must be made to an ambitious Community research programme on the application of information technology and telecommunication in Transport called DRIVE ("Dedicated Road Safety Systems and Intelligent Vehicles in Europe").

The objectives of the programme are to improve road safety, improve the performance on road transport and improve the environment through such things as analysis of traffic accident data, radar systems, route guidance, software for infrastructure planning, traffic management and so on.

18. In the framework of COST (which is a forum supported by the Commission where the 12 Member States and other European third countries coordinate research programmes, among which the field of transport) a new project is now examined, (COST 313) on economic and social cost of accidents.

19. Vulnerable road users is one of the areas to which the Commission is particularly attached. In order to complete the Directive on seat belts, the Commission is carrying out a project aiming at a complete inventory of available child restraint systems and clear advice to the public on how to protect children up to 12 years.

In this context, a comparative study on policy and provisions for cyclists in Europe executed by the European Cyclists's Federation with German and Dutch institutes will constitute the basis for further action in this field. This study has been presented to the European Parliament on 27 October 1988.