

# Safety and health at work: exposure of workers to mechanical vibrations

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The Commission presented a working document accompanying the [Commission communication](#) to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the modernisation of the EU occupational safety and health legislation and policy.

The detailed ex-post evaluation of the EU acquis, checking their relevance as well as efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and EU added value, carried out by the Commission confirms that the framework meets its ambition to adequately protect workers.

**Main conclusions:** the evaluation concluded that the overall structure of the EU occupational safety and health acquis, consisting of a goal-oriented Framework Directive complemented by specific Directives, is generally effective and fit-for-purpose.

However, it pointed to **specific provisions of individual Directives that have become outdated or obsolete**, and highlighted the need to find effective ways to **address new risks**.

The way in which Member States have transposed the EU occupational safety and health Directives varies considerably across Member States. Compliance costs therefore vary and cannot be easily dissociated from more detailed national requirements.

**As regards SMEs:** the evaluation clearly concluded that compliance with the occupational safety and health Directives is more challenging for SMEs than large establishments, while at the same time the **major and fatal injury rates are higher for SMEs**. Specific support measures are therefore necessary to **reach SMEs** and help them increase their compliance in an efficient and effective way.

**Next steps:** the evaluation considered that occupational safety and health measures should reach the widest number of people at work, **no matter the type of working relationship they are in, and no matter the size of company they work for**. Compliance with occupational safety and health rules should be manageable for businesses of all sizes and effectively monitored on the ground.

Measures must be result-oriented, instead of paper-driven, and maximum use should be made of **new digital tools** to facilitate implementation.

**Characteristics of the evaluation:** this exercise also forms part of the Commission's Regulatory Fitness (REFIT) Programme with a special focus on SMEs. In this respect, the evaluation concentrated both on Framework Directive 89/391/EEC and on the other 23 directives related to it.

**The evaluation also concerned Directive 2002/44/EC** of the European Parliament and of the Council on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risk arising from physical agents (vibration) (sixteenth individual directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC).

The Directive has the objective of minimising the incidence of diseases and accidents caused by workers' exposure to vibration. The focus is on long term health issues, rather than acute accidents, although some acute risks to safety are also identified.

It does so by laying down minimum requirements for the protection of workers from risks to their safety and health arising or likely to arise from exposure to either whole-body or hand-arm vibration – in particular muscular/bone structure, neurological and vascular disorders, namely by setting up **exposure limit values** and action values in respect of the daily exposure to vibration.

The evaluation noted that the Directive remains relevant and has fulfilled its objectives. This said, the evaluation study made a number of recommendations for the way forward when developing the Directive:

- **revise limit values:** limit values can be revised due to the fact that modern machines in general emit less vibration and that many production processes have been automated. Some limit values may be reduced as low-cost technical solutions have become available to reduce vibration. Others may become less important to address as fewer and fewer workers are exposed to certain types of vibration. Consequently, it is recommended that the procedures of adoption/amendment of limit values and action values are clarified and where relevant are harmonised with the other physical agents Directives;
- **review the risk assessment procedure under the Directive:** the idea would be to include the provision of Directive 2003/10/EC (noise) requiring employers to give particular attention to the extension of exposure beyond normal working hours under the employer's responsibility;
- **examine the risk management measures** derived from the risk assessment under the Directive to ensure that they include measures on the limitation of the duration and levels of the exposure;
- **consider using a common instrument for vibration and noise** by aligning it with the more stringent requirements set by the 1977 ILO Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention (No. 148).