Construction products: Application of the directive 89/106/EEC

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The construction industry accounts for approximately 10% of the GDP of the European Union (ECU 600 billion). It employs some 9 million workers directly and 14 million workers depend on it indirectly (service companies, public services, distribution, deliveries). The construction industry therefore accounts for approximately 20% of total employment in Europe. Some 1.8 million enterprises work in the industry, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises employing a staff of fewer than 20 salaried employees. The aim of the "construction products directive" adopted on 21 December 1988 is to eliminate barriers to the free movement of construction products due mainly to differing standards, test and conformity certification procedures and national construction regulations. The directive lays down the main requirements applicable to structures (mechanical resistance and stability, fire safety, hygiene, health, environment, safe use, soundproofing, energy saving and thermal insulation). Eight years after the directive entered into force, 17 out of 40 sets of products have been standardized. There are 70 products and groups of products which still need basic standards and 1,000 - 1,500 standardization projects. The blame lies at the door of the Member States, who are standing their ground. The rapporteur, Mr Werner LANGEN (PPE, D) called on the Commission to adopt the standardization mandates and implementing decision relating to the outstanding product groups by mid-1998 and proposed that, when handing down a standardization mandate, the Commission should at the same time enter into an agreement which imposes daily penalties if the deadline for the completion of a standard is not observed and, conversely, provides for a bonus if the European Standardization Committee (CEN) completes a standard before the deadline. He deplored the lack of progress in the mutual recognition of test procedures for construction products, for which the Member States' obstructiveness was to blame and called for an end to over-regulation of and excessive burdens on the manufacturers and users of construction products. Finally, he called for a ban on the use of chrysotile asbestos in construction products.