Road safety: seats, anchorages and head restraints (amend. Directive 74/408/EEC)

2003/0128(COD) - 20/06/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to amend Council Directive 74/408/EEC and extend the compulsory installation of safety belts in vehicles. CONTENT : This is one of three directives concerning the installation of safety belts in relation to vehicles. The three directives are: - Council Directive 77/541/EEC relating to safety belts and restraint systems of motor vehicles; - Council Directive 76/115/EEC relating to anchorages for motor-vehicles safety belts; - Council Directive 74/408/EEC relating to motor vehicles with regard to the seats, their anchorages and head restraints. With a view to the compulsory installation of safety belts in all vehicles, the Commission proposes to amend the three Directives simultaneously. They should be adopted at the same time and be implemented at the same date. Safety belt anchorages intended for heavy-duty vehicles including buses and coaches cannot, for technical reasons, be fixed into the body structure of the vehicle, as is usually the case for passenger cars, and are fixed to the seats. For this reason, compliance with the three Directives in combination is required since safety belts and/or restraint systems have to be securely attached to reinforced and standardised anchorages, installed in the vehicle in such a way as to allow the correct wearing of the belts. Moreover, the forces exerted on the belt by the human body in the case of an impact are transferred to the seat anchorages, which is why their strength should be checked under combined loads. To date, no safety belt has been required in the case of side-facing seats. The Commission has decided to ban side-facing seats from these vehicles with the exception of city buses. The two main points of the proposal concern : 1) the amendment to Directive 74/408/EEC : the proposal defines the vehicles of category M2 and M3 taking into account Directive 2001/85/EC on buses and coaches. This approach provides the appropriate means to operate a distinction between city-buses, inter-city buses and travel coaches. A new article is inserted in the Directive with a view to banning installation of sidefacing seats in new vehicle types from 1 July 2004 and in new vehicles belonging to existing types from 1 January 2006. Some exemptions are permitted, which take into account the special use of special purpose vehicles, which can require side-facing seats, such as ambulances. 2) Implementation : the relevant dates are as follows: - 1st January 2004: the date from when Member States have to accept vehicles approved in accordance with the amending Directive; - 1st July 2004: the date from when new types of vehicles belonging to the concerned categories have to fulfil the requirements of the Directive; - 1st January 2006: the date from when all new vehicles belonging to existing types have to comply with the Directive.