Safety and health at work: exposure of workers to noise

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The committee adopted the report by Helle THORNING-SCHMIDT (PES, DK) amending the Council's common position under the second reading of the codecision procedure. In particular, MEPs felt that the upper limit value for very powerful impulses (peak sound pressure) should be lowered. They also wanted to include a provision, based on the Commission's original proposal, stipulating that Member States should take steps to reduce noise exposure levels in the case of "activities which call for particular vigilance", where necessary laying down values which are stricter than those provided for in the directive. By way of explanation for its amendment, the committee pointed out that there were a number of non-industrial activities which may be unpleasant and stressful even where the noise exposure levels are substantially lower than the general limit values (for example, in offices). Whereas the Council wanted to measure noise using a week as the reference period rather than a working day, as the Commission had proposed, the committee felt that this should be a derogation to be granted in exceptional cases only (i.e. in the case of activities where daily noise exposure varied markedly from one working day to the next). A few amendments also clarified the responsibilities of employers by spelling out that the latter were responsible for enforcing the wearing of hearing protectors and providing information and training for employees in the proper use of the various hearing protectors available in the workplace. The committee also wanted workers to be entitled to have hearing tests at an earlier stage than that laid down in the proposal. Other amendments called for the exchange of good practice aimed at reducing exposure to noise and for the establishment of databases to enable employers to purchase the best possible equipment. Lastly, the committee called on the Commission to carry out an overall assessment of the implementation of the directive.