Safety, hygiene and health at work: Community programme 1996-2000. Reports included

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PURPOSE: to present a mid-term report on the state of activities carried out under the Community Programme on Health and Safety at Work for the period 1996-2000. CONTENT: The report is divided into two parts: the first part deals with activities over the period 1996-1998. The second part concentrates on priorities for the period 1998-2000. 1) from 1996-1998, it is considered that the following actions deserve particular attention: - the setting up of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao; - a proposal for a Council decision (as yet unadopted) adopting a programme of non-legislative measures to improve health and safety at work (SAFE). While awaiting adoption of the programme, the Commission has co-financed a number of preparatory and pilot projects with a view to help accomodating particular needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, to promote best practice as standard for the development of a work environment that is safe, productive and competitive, and to advance in correct and effective application of EU health and safety legislation. - the transposition and updating of existing legislative measures, notably the revision of the Chemical Agents Directive (98/24/EC), the amendment of Directive 89/655/EEC concerning minimum health and safety requirements for the use of work equipment by workers at work (extending these requirements to mobile equipment and equipment for lifting loads), and the adaptation of certain other directives to scientific and technological progress (biological agents, carcinogens); - in 1996, the rate of transposition by Member States of the Directives adopted under Article 118A was (about) 74%. This has now reached 95%. 2) the report sets out the following priorities for 1998-2000: - making legislation more effective: this involves matching correct transposition with proper implementation and practical application. To this end, the Commission will promote the greater involvement of the 9000 labour inspectors in the 15 Member States in encouraging the effective enforcement of Community law. It also intends to increase cooperation with such committees as the Advisory Committee for Health, Hygiene and Safety at Work and the Committee of Senior Labour Inspectors (SLIC) and, if necessary, propose improvements to legislation. Particular attention is given to providing guidance for SMEs on the areas of health and safety legislation relevant to them; - preparing for enlargement: the Commission, by means of the Accession Partnerships, will assess the degree of compliance of the applicant countries with the acquis and what help is required to carry out changes in areas where they don't comply; - strengthen the link with employability: in this area, the Commission sets out two main priorities. Firstly, the prevention of the 5 million accidents at work and occupational diseases which affect workers in the EU every year. Secondly, improving the employability of people with disabilities, who represent 10-12% of the EU population; - addressing new risks in working conditions at a time ofchange: the transformation of the economy into a service economy, a steady increase in the number of women in employment, the ageing of the workforce and the development of new forms of organisation of work are all trends which pose new risks to workers, such as stress. The Commission proposes putting more emphasis on the implication of these changes and the anticipation of further developments to ensure that these issues are addressed in future health and safety policies.