

Safety and health at work: exposure of workers to optical radiations

1992/0449B(COD) - 07/09/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, 2nd reading

The European Parliament adopted a report drafted by Csaba **RY**(EPP-ED, HU) and made some amendments to the common position:

-A new clause states clearly that the aims of the Directive include the prevention and early diagnosis of any adverse health effects, as well as the prevention of any long-term health risks and any risk of chronic diseases, resulting from exposure to optical radiation.

-The implementation of the Directive must not serve to justify any regression in relation to the situation which already prevails in each Member State .

- The definition of any obligations on the employer to assess risks to health and safety arising from natural sources of optical radiation should come within the regulatory competence of the Member States and not within Community competence. The Council's text had stated that the employer, in the case of workers exposed to natural sources of optical radiation, must assess the risks to health and safety so that the measures needed to minimise these risks can be identified and put into effect. The Council's text had also required employers to set up an action plan if a risk is identified.

- It should be clearly stated that the purpose of health surveillance of workers is "the prevention and early diagnosis of any adverse health effects, as well as the prevention of any long-term health risks and any risk of chronic diseases, resulting from exposure to optical radiation". In the event of over-exposure, workers should be entitled to a medical examination;

-The Commission should draw up a practical guide to help employers, in particular managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), better to understand the technical provisions of this Directive. The Commission should strive to complete this guide as quickly as possible so as to facilitate adoption by the Member States of the measures necessary to implement this Directive.

-Member States must ensure that health surveillance is carried out by a doctor, an occupational health professional or a medical authority responsible for health surveillance in accordance with national law and practice. The employer must take appropriate measures to ensure that the doctor, the occupational health professional or the medical authority responsible for the health surveillance, as determined by Member States as appropriate, has access to the results of the risk assessment referred to in Article 4 where such results may be relevant to the health surveillance.

It should be noted that Parliament did not follow the Parliamentary committee's recommendations in certain matters:

-the clause which provided for an evaluation of risks from natural optical radiation (as well as an action plan to reduce these risks to the minimum) deleted by 377 votes for, 279 against and 15 abstentions;

MEPs agreed that rules on radiation from artificial sources are best laid down at EU level. Concerning radiation from lasers, for example, the Council common position sets exposure limit values for the exposure of workers to this kind of radiation and gives details on the measures the employer has to take to protect employees. If, in spite of everything, these values are exceeded, employers must immediately take measures to reduce exposure below the limit values, identify the reasons why they have been exceeded

and adapt the protection and prevention measures accordingly in order to prevent any recurrence of such incidents. MEPs agree with these rules, although they want the Commission to draw up a practical guide to help employers, in particular managers of smaller firms, to understand the technical provisions of the directive.