Road safety: retrofitting of mirrors to existing fleet of heavy goods vehicles

2006/0183(COD) - 05/10/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to reduce the number of accidents by retrofitting mirrors to heavy good vehicles registered in the Community.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: the purpose of this proposed Directive is to improve the field of indirect vision of existing (as opposed to new) heavy good vehicles. It is aimed, in particular, at vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, who are particularly prone to accidents with heavy good vehicles given that lorries have a lateral blind spot on the passenger's side. The most frequent cause of an accident is when a heavy duty driver fails to notice a pedestrian or cyclist when taking a right turn.

Legislation making an improved set of mirrors mandatory from 2006/2007 is already in place. See Directive 2003/97/EC on the approximation of laws of the Member States relating to the type-approval devices for indirect vision and of vehicles equipped with these devices (COD/2001/0317). In other words, new heavy duty vehicles of more than 3.5 tons will have to be equipped with blind spot mirrors as of next year. This measure, however, does not address the risk that existing heavy good vehicles pose. There is an estimated 5 million heavy good vehicles currently in circulation to which Directive 2003/97/EC does not apply.

As a result, and upon the request of both Parliament and the Member States (Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark in particular) the Commission is proposing to extend the requirements for the lateral field of indirect vision, to the existing fleet of heavy goods vehicles.

The Commission estimates that in retrofitting existing heavy vehicles with "blind spot mirrors" more than 1200 lives could be saved on European roads between now and 2020. The current cost of fitting retro mirrors does not present a huge financial burden – (EUR 100 – EUR 150). Should, however, there be higher costs involved, the proposed Directive allows for some flexibility. Inspection authorities can, for example, accept exceptional alternative solutions in order to prevent a distortion of competition in the haulage market.