

## Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work

2007/2146(INI) - 03/09/2009 - Follow-up document

This report from the Commission is on the practical implementation of Health and Safety at Work Directives 92/91/EEC (mineral extraction through drilling) and 92/104/EEC (surface and underground mineral extraction). It fulfils a Commission undertaking to assess the practical implementation of the regulatory framework with a view to improving it. It covers the transposition and implementation, in EU-15 only, of the two Directives but may also provide useful information on the application of the Directives for the 12 Member States that have meanwhile joined the EU.

Directive 92/91/EEC applies specifically to the safety and health of workers in the extractive industries concerned with exploration for and exploitation of minerals by means of boreholes (onshore and offshore), while Directive 92/104/EEC covers the remaining sectors of the extractive industries, i.e. exploration for and exploitation of minerals in surface or underground mines and quarries.

Main conclusions: the Commission concludes that, while the two Directives' implementation in the 15 Member States concerned appears to be relatively satisfactory and accident rates in the extractive industries sector are down, numbers of accidents and cases of occupational disease occurring are unacceptably high and workers still run great risks in this sector. To improve the situation, the Community strategy for 2007-2012 encourages the Member States to adopt national strategies establishing quantitative objectives for reducing the incidence of occupational accidents and illnesses, to target sectors and companies with the worst track records, such as the extractive industry sector, and to focus on the most common risks and the most vulnerable workers.

The Commission notes that, as in other sectors, there seems to be a clear division between types of companies: the larger companies, especially in the drilling sector, perform relatively well, while SMEs, especially in the ornamental stone-quarrying sector, seem less well-equipped to put in place an effective health and safety policy.

Therefore, companies clearly need to put health and safety higher up their agendas. Apart from the social/ethical considerations, there are important financial reasons why companies should put in place a policy for the prevention of accidents and occupational diseases. A proper prevention policy will bring clear financial benefits: companies should be made aware that they need to consider not only the cost of insurance premiums and prevention measures but also the more indirect costs of accidents and occupational diseases (such as costs relating to the worker's replacement, loss of production and damage caused by a negative public image), which are likely to be far higher. When viewed from such a pragmatic perspective, investments in preventive measures will seem rather small and companies may be more inclined to make them. The Member States need to be more active in raising companies' awareness of such considerations.

Moreover, health and safety knowledge needs to be more evenly spread among companies of different type and size. This could be a task for the Member States, which could tackle it by drawing up guidelines and assisting and training smaller companies, in particular, to apply an effective health and safety policy. To make progress in this area, the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work could address the particular issue of training. As the Community strategy for 2007-2012 states, the Commission will look at the specific problems relating to subcontracting in greater depth. Experience with subcontracting in this sector could be exported to other sectors. In this connection, the role of people and their limits in an environment increasingly dominated by advanced technology should be borne in mind.

The Commission also highlights the importance of the role of workers' representatives and the need to share best practice. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao could assist in disseminating specific, targeted information, especially to the Member States that have joined the EU more recently.

Meanwhile, several Member States stress that amending the Directives is not necessary for the moment, probably because of the general wording of the Directives, which allows them to apply to a wide range of situations.

In the light of the information presented in this report, the Commission agrees that there is currently no need to amend the Directives.

Lastly, the Commission calls on the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work through its Standing Working Party for the Mining and Other Extractive Industries to draw conclusions from this evaluation.