



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

Commission proposes to revamp rules to protect EU workers from harmful electromagnetic fields

Brussels, 14 June 2011 – A proposal to update and improve EU rules to protect workers from electromagnetic fields in their daily tasks has just been put forward by the European Commission. The rules are to protect workers like doctors and nurses giving patients magnetic resonance imaging scans (MRI), people working with radar, welders and workers repairing power lines. The proposal would replace the current Directive ([2004/40/EC](#)).

The proposal takes account of the 2004 Directive on minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from electromagnetic fields. It would update the current exposure limits to take on board new scientific evidence - particularly in relation to exposure limits of MRI in hospitals. It would also include a number of provisions to help employers in their efforts to carry out the risk assessments required by EU law. The aim of the proposal is to balance the protection of workers' health and safety with appropriate flexibility and proportionality so as not to unduly hamper the use and development of industrial and medical activities.

Welcoming the adoption of the proposal by the Commission, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion László Andor said "After a transparent and open consultation process with the scientific and medical communities, with industry and workers, we have put a proposal on the table that is up-to-date and with practical rules to better protect workers exposed to electromagnetic fields. The new rules are a major step in reducing the burden for SMEs in comparison with the 2004 Directive.."

What's covered by the directive?

The proposal clarifies the definitions on adverse effects on health, introduces an updated exposure limits system (frequencies that are recognised as having harmful effects on the human cardiovascular system or the central nervous system), as well as a number of provisions intended to facilitate the work of the employers when carrying out the risk assessments required by law.

As employers are obliged to carry out risk evaluations, the proposal would introduce detailed provisions to ensure a proportionate approach as well as to ensure adequate preventive measures to reduce the exposure of workers to electromagnetic fields. The proposal would require employers to give exposed workers and their representatives the necessary information and training, particularly relating to the outcome of the risk assessment, the measures taken by the employer, safe working practices, the detection of adverse effects and the circumstances in which workers are entitled to health checks.

In the case of a worker maintaining high tension lines, for example, the proposal would require the employer to evaluate the risks of exposure to electromagnetic fields and take measures to reduce them. This could vary from increasing the distance, to reducing the intensity, limiting exposure time etc. For the medical magnetic resonance imaging sector, or MRI scans, the proposal would require appropriate good practices to be developed and disseminated to limit the exposure of workers who carry out of magnetic resonance imaging scans. For the armed forces, harmonised North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) norms for those working with radar would have to be applied in the Member States concerned.

The proposal would foresee specific provisions for workers who wear an Active Implantable Medical Device (AIMD) – like a pacemaker - and pregnant women, who are considered to be especially at risk and need special protection. for such cases.

The proposal only covers workers during their professional activities. All other categories of people, such as consumers, phone users and passengers, are covered by the existing Council Recommendation 1999/519/EEC for the general public and specific legislation in each Member State.

Next steps

The proposal will be sent to the European Parliament and the EU's Council of Ministers for adoption. The new directive's deadline for implementation will be set by the Parliament and the Council.

Further information

Health and safety at work – physical agents

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=716&langId=en&intPagId=222>

Directive 2004/40/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (electromagnetic fields)

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:02004L0040-20081211:EN:NOT>

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