WRITTEN QUESTION E-1323/04
by John Bowis (PPE-DE) and Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Implementation of worker safety directives and protection of health-care workers and their patients

Further to the Commission's answer to Question E-4041/03[1] of 13 February 2004, it is estimated that one million needlestick injuries are suffered by health-care workers in Europe each year, placing them at risk from hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV and many other potentially fatal blood-borne infections.

In the USA, the Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act requires that effective training and education, engineering controls and work practices are implemented to help protect health-care workers and their patients.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work recommends a number of applicable preventive measures, including safety training and the use of devices with safety features, which are published in their document Facts 29 (ISSN 1681-2123). Studies show that the implementation of such measures can reduce needlestick injuries by more than 80%.

However, independent studies consistently show that European hospitals have not consistently implemented applicable measures to protect staff from needlestick injury.

Additionally, the Commission's communication COM (2004) 62, concerning the practical implementation of the health and safety at work directives, refer to problems with the public sector, including hospitals.

To address this life-threatening issue, the implementation of the measures recommended by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work must be more directly linked to compliance with the applicable safety directives, such as by incorporating them as an annex to the Directive 2000/54/EC[2] concerning biological agents.

Does the Commission agree that urgent and concrete steps need to be taken to protect healthcare workers from the potentially fatal infections that can result from needlestick and other medical sharps injuries?

---

[1]   OJ C
[2]   OJ L 262, 17.10.2000, p.21.