



European information and cooperation systems for market surveillance

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In the context of New Approach directives, market surveillance constitutes the practical proof that the system works, particularly with regard to the implementation of directives with a great impact on occupational health and safety such as the Machinery Directive and the Personal Protective Equipment Directive. This activity, which is vital for the reliability of European harmonization in compliance with regulations on health and safety at work, is however still largely underestimated outside a small circle of experts.

Many questions arise which cannot easily be answered. For example:

- How can the return of experience gained by a large number of people active in the field (users, test bodies, OSH experts, specialist institutions ...) be guaranteed?
- What kind of knowledge and methodology is necessary to organize this feedback and to anticipate current trends?
- How can the confidentiality of distributed information be assured if necessary? How can the technical expertise necessary for a just decision on non-conforming equipment be assured?
- How can the coherence between the different networks and information systems in place at national and community level be guaranteed?
- How can the feedback of experience into the technical standardization work be assured in order for problems encountered on site to be taken into account?
- How can the publication of decisions necessary for both the safety and health of users and the fairness of competition be assured?

Partial answers have been given to the public authorities such as the French Ministry of labour, and show their limitations in view of the diversity of national situations, the very little formalised character of the existing community framework and in view of the need to allocate existing resources reasonably. It seems to us that the public authorities of the different member states and of the Community all face questions of the same nature.

We have had the occasion to discuss these questions in many sector and cross-sectional fora at national and European level. Certain insights resulting from these discussions are taken up in the propositions for the new Machinery Directive which is currently being discussed at the European Parliament.

In a European Union facing the triple challenge of enlargement, consolidation and globalization, a general and harmonized answer to these questions is certainly necessary for the credibility of the system.