

Physical Agents Directive:

Whole Body Vibration

The Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive received its second reading at the European Parliament on the 23rd October 2001.

Amendments to the previous draft were adopted as follows:

To reduce the whole body vibration exposure limit value from $1.15 \text{ m/s}^2 \text{ A}(8)$ to $0.8 \text{ m/s}^2 \text{ A}(8)$

To reduce the whole body vibration exposure action value from $0.6 \text{ m/s}^2 \text{ A}(8)$ to $0.5 \text{ m/s}^2 \text{ A}(8)$.

To reduce from 6 years to 5 years the transitional period for existing equipment before the exposure limit value must apply.

To begin the transitional period 2 years after adoption of the Directive instead of 3 years after adoption.

To reduce from 6 years to 3 years (from the date of adoption of the Directive) the period before the exposure limit value would have to apply to new equipment.

To add agriculture and forestry to the list of industries eligible for derogation from the whole-body vibration exposure limit values.

To determine the exposure limit value for agriculture and forestry 5 years after the Directive comes into force in the light of the latest research and scientific information available at that time.

A Council working group subsequently considered that none of the above amendments was acceptable.

Comment

It is not clear if any of the above amendments will ultimately be adopted.

The Directive would be influential in defining the Duty of Care.

LPC reviewed the subject of Whole Body Vibration (WBV) in 1999. The review concluded that low back pain was the most commonly associated health problem.

Detailed examination of research findings showed that WBV can (at very high levels) aggravate organic conditions but its action as an initiator of injury remained uncertain.

The clearest finding was that high levels of exposure to WBV made work uncomfortable / too difficult for a significant proportion of people who have back pain. They then report back pain as the reason for work absence.

The proposed amendments to the exposure levels in the Directive are consistent with ensuring the comfort of people with existing back pain. They are not accurately consistent with protection from initiation; no one knows what the appropriate level would be. The Directive as is or as amended would be effective in reducing sickness absence attributed to low back pain and work.

In our view, route-mean-square exposure measures are not proven to be more effective than the alternative vibration-dose-value in ensuring comfort at work.

