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New Legislation to Reduce Injuries for Health Workers

The European Commission has adopted a Directive to prevent injuries and infections to healthcare workers from sharp objects such as needle sticks. The Directive implements in law a framework agreement on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sectors signed in July 2009 by the European Public Services Union (EPSU) and the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (HOSPEEM) – European Social partner organisations that together employ more than 3.5 million healthcare workers.

Needle Injuries a Serious Threat

Injuries and infections from needle sticks amount to one of the most serious health and safety threats in European workplaces and estimated to cause one million injuries each year. The agreement addresses one of the priority objectives of the EU's current strategy for health and safety at work, which aims to cut workplace injuries by 25 percent by 2012. Furthermore, the Directive specifically aims to:

- Achieve the safest possible working environment for employees in the sector and protect workers at risk, as well as patients;
- Prevent injuries to workers caused by all types of sharp medical objects including needle sticks, and
- Set-up an integrated approach to assessing and preventing risks as well as to training and informing.
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Speaking at the Council of Ministers meeting, László Andor, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion said, "The healthcare sector is one of the biggest employers in Europe and needles represent a real risk to workers, both in terms of injuries and increased rates of life-threatening infections like HIV or hepatitis". He added, "This new Directive will better protect workers and their families while reducing the burden of injuries on European health services".

The European Parliament first proposed a resolution for the Commission in 2006, specifically addressing blood-borne infections due to needle stick injuries. Meetings with stakeholders, nurses, doctors, surgeons, etc., and further negotiations took place to arrive at the current legislation.

For more information, visit: www.europa.eu, Reference IP/10/243

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