

European Parliament Workshop on Hotel Safety

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**Hotel safety -
Protecting consumers – how safe is your hotel?**

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Madame Chair, dear Members of the IMCO Committee,

Good morning and thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to address you here today on behalf of ANEC.

Hotel safety is an issue which many consumers take for granted when travelling, expecting a similar standard of safety from one Member State to another. Regrettably this is not the case. In addition to issues such as swimming pool or carbon monoxide safety, in particular hotel fires pose a threat to the safety of consumers - a threat which ANEC believes can be significantly reduced through stronger and more harmonised European regulation. I would like to start today by outlining some relevant trends:

As the largest tourism destination in the world, according to data from Eurostat and the UN WTO, Europe received over 460 million visitors in 2006¹, of which ca. 88% are either domestic tourists or visitors from other EU-25 Member States². In 2007, the number of nights spent in hotels and similar establishments increased by 3% from the previous year³. At the same time, there has been a decline in the average size of hotels in the new Member States in the years 1995-2005⁴. Although complete and comparable data at the EU level on the number of hotel fire accidents and casualties is not available, national data from the UK shows that there were approximately 2000 fires in 'hotels, boarding houses, hostels and similar' in the year 2006⁵. If considering this figure in relation to the country's population, it is likely that a similar fire to population ratio would be applicable to most Member States.

These data should be considered together with the fact that the European population is ageing - meaning that an increasingly large proportion of the population will have a disability of one type or another, and will need such disabilities to be accommodated when travelling within Europe in the future. In terms of fire safety, few hotels are currently taking the particular needs of disabled persons systematically into account.

¹ World Tourism Organisation, Tourism Market Trends 2007

² Data received from Eurostat and in Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, 52/2007

³ Eurostat, Data in Focus, Tourism in Europe: First results for 2007 (5/2008)

⁴ Eurostat, Panorama on tourism, 2007 edition

⁵ Communities and Local Government, Fire Statistics, United Kingdom, 2006

When adopted over 20 years ago, the aim of Council Recommendation 86/666/EEC on fire safety in hotels was to define clear, minimum safety standards for all hotels in the EU. As concluded by the 2001 Commission Report, the objective has not been fully achieved, in particular due to the fact that some Member States have chosen to apply the provisions to only new or renovated hotels.

Considering the trends I outlined, the question today is what can, and what should, the European Union do to ensure the safety and security of consumers in the future? There is currently no up-to-date European reference document on fire safety in hotels, nor do we have a 'General Service Safety Directive' which would serve as an overarching instrument for service safety in Europe, as is the case for products.

It is clear that the Council Recommendation, including the annexed technical guidelines, no longer provides state-of-the-art minimum safety standards for hotel accommodation and needs to be revised. However, considering the failure of this type of non-binding instrument to ensure a common minimum level of safety in hotels, ANEC believes there is an urgent need for a stronger European instrument, namely a Directive on fire safety in hotels. Not only would a European Directive in this field bring true benefits to consumers, but such an instrument would also be flexible enough to take into account the vast range of hotel types and sizes.

Although the possibility of revising the current technical guidelines by way of a voluntary standard, a CEN Technical Report, has been put forward, we do not consider such a voluntary measure to be robust enough to significantly reduce the risks related to fires in hotels. National standards would still be allowed to co-exist alongside a CEN Technical Report, thus such a document would do little to achieve a common minimum level of safety or to increase consumer confidence and protection in comparison to the status quo. However, we do believe voluntary standards have a role to play in supporting the legislative framework proposed, by setting the more technical specifications and requirements.

In order to improve consumer protection, while bearing in mind the increasing number of consumers with disabilities, ANEC recommends the following four changes to be incorporated in a revised legislative instrument, taking the current Recommendation as a starting point:

1. The scope should be reviewed to cover establishments of less than 20 guests – most consumers would be unsettled to find out that they may be less protected in a small holiday residence or lodge, than in a large hotel complex.
2. The Directive should apply to all hotels, whether existing, newly renovated or brand new.
3. In the new legal instrument, more emphasis should be placed on emergency planning, fire safety management, and staff training and awareness, i.e. on issues which may be addressed in new and old hotels, irrespective of their

size. Less emphasis should be put on e.g. technical constructional features, which would be more appropriately addressed in other legislation such as the Construction Products Directive, or via formal European Standards, as already mentioned.

4. Finally, and referring back to what I mentioned earlier on the needs of persons with disabilities, much more attention should be given to the measures taken to ensure the safety of such persons. Particular examples we would like to mention here are:
 - The rather simple measure of making sure alarms and safety signs are perceivable to persons with visual or hearing impairments. E.g. vibrating alarm clocks to be placed under pillows.
 - Hotel staff should have the obligation to show the exit routes to all guests with disabilities, especially those travelling alone.
 - All hotel staff should undergo customer care training, including disability awareness training.
 - If evacuation is difficult or impractical, fire-protected 'refuge areas' should be designated for e.g. wheelchair users.
 - Access audits should be carried out more systematically.

Considering the current Recommendation dates back over 20 years, and that the Commission Report, identifying the need for updating the technical guidelines, dates from 2001, we believe it is truly high time to bring the standards to the level expected of Europe to ensure a safer future for all consumers and to reduce the number of fatalities in hotel fires. We do not believe developing another non-binding document would be sufficient to achieve a common minimum level of hotel safety, and therefore ask Members of the European Parliament to support our call for a binding legislative instrument on fire safety in hotels.

I thank you for your attention.