

WRITTEN QUESTION E-7096/08
by Toine Manders (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: Introduction of a European Union statutory maximum limit of 23 kg which may be lifted manually

The risks of accidents at the workplace are higher than average in the building sector. This is being compounded by a considerable increase in the number of health problems arising in this sector, for example back injury caused by lifting excessively heavy weights. Not only the building sector but also the healthcare and day nursery sectors are being affected by staff absences due to injuries of this nature.

Scientific studies have led the American National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to conclude that 23 kg is the maximum weight which may be lifted manually under optimal conditions if health risks are to be avoided.

The Dutch Supreme Court has since ruled that the NIOSH health and safety provisions shall currently apply regarding the lifting of weights, thereby confirming the existence of scientifically established health regulations in this respect and making it legally possible for the Labour Inspectorate to take action on the basis of the 23 kg limit.

1. What measures have been taken to date by the Commission to prevent back and other injuries caused by lifting excessively heavy weights?
2. Does the Commission agree that provisions applicable in Europe regarding the maximum weight which may be lifted manually would clarify matters for employers and workers, obviating the need for legal proceedings by individual workers? If not, why not?
3. Does the Commission agree that the NIOSH 23 kg limit should be introduced in the European Union, that it encourages innovation in Europe by giving employers the opportunity of distinguishing themselves on the European employment market by coming up with creative solutions and that it will help to alleviate the problem of staff absences? If so, why and if not, why not?