

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3725/00  
by Maria Sanders-ten Holte (ELDR)  
to the Commission

Subject: Improving safety in tunnels

The major accident which occurred in a mountain railway tunnel in Kaprun (Austria) on 11 November gives renewed cause for serious concern about the safety of transport tunnels, both road and railway.

The European automobile and touring clubs AIT (International Touring Alliance) and FIA (International Automobile Federation) carried out investigations this year on the safety of 25 major European road tunnels, and concluded that at least 8 of these were inadequate, some of them having very serious defects in terms of escape routes, fire safety or rescue services.

Incidents in narrow, long tunnels are frequent – according to a Swiss study as many as 200 to 1000 per year. These are mostly breakdowns. Serious collisions happen between 5 and 20 times a year, though the figure is at least 40% higher for single-line tunnels. Fires are a regular occurrence. According to an AIPRC (Permanent International Association of Road Congresses) study, the frequency is 10-25 fires per 100 million vehicle-km. In a long, narrow tunnel that is on average one fire every three months!

1. Does Commissioner Palacio consider, given that fires in transport tunnels can have very serious consequences, that significantly more attention ought to be paid to the safety of tunnels in Europe?
2. In the light of the above, does the Commissioner consider it necessary to take concrete measures as soon as possible to improve safety conditions in both road and rail tunnels? If, so, when can such measures be taken?