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REMARKS OF AN ACOUSTICAL CONSULTANT ON THE ITALIAN APPLICATION OF THE CEE DIRECTIVE N. 86/188 AGAINST OCCUPATIONAL HEARING LOSS

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ABSTRACT

Occupational hearing loss: the Directive 86/188/CEE was approved in Italy with the law (*Decreto Legislativo*) n. 277 of the 15th august 1991, preceded in may 1989 by the Italian standard UNI 9432. Up to now we don't have an uniform national application of the law: the consequence is a non homogeneous documentation and evaluation criterion.

1 - PAPER

As it is well known the hearing loss is the first and most important occupational disease.

The European Union started to face the problem with the directive 86/188/CEE, 12/05/1986, published on the G.U. n. 137/28, 24/05/1986.

To popularise the "noise risk", following the directive 86/188, printed in may 1989 at the "*Ente Nazionale di Unificazione*" (UNI) and prepared by myself, we had the Italian standard **UNI 9432** "*Determinazione del livello di esposizione personale al rumore nell'ambiente di lavoro*", and, two years later, the law (*Decreto Legislativo*) n. **277** of the 15th august 1991, "*Attuazione delle direttive n. 80/1107/CEE, 82/605/CEE, 83/477/CEE, 86/188/CEE e 88/642/CEE, in materia di protezione dei lavoratori contro i rischi derivanti da esposizione ad agenti chimici, fisici e biologici durante il lavoro, a norma dell'art. 7 della legge 30 luglio 1990, n 212*", was approved.

The **277/91** should have been followed by a "*decreto applicativo*" (*DPCM*) indicating forms, reports and rules to be used for the practical registration and communication of the requirements of the law (art. 4 comma 2 letter q); such *DPCM* is not ready yet, but a good consultant knows how to fulfil the requirements.

Enquiring on the application of the 277/91, I found that, after nine years, we don't have an uniform national application of the law (north, centre and south Italy) but we still have strong differences between big and small industrial activities, with an important gap on the artisan activities.

The knowledge of the 277/91 is increasing a little with the Italian law *Decreto Legislativo 19 settembre 1994, n. 626*, "*Attuazione delle direttive 89/391/CEE, 89/654/CEE, 89/655/CEE, 89/656/CEE, 90/269/CEE, 90/270/CEE, 90/394/CEE e 90/679/CEE riguardanti il miglioramento della sicurezza e della salute dei lavoratori sul luogo di lavoro*".

In Italy all the big industries applied (almost always) the law properly, but it is not the same for the medium and small industries and for the handicraft (the artisan class): many people don't know the existence of this law, someone else knows it but very few fulfil the noise evaluation and write a correct report; the consequence is a national non homogeneous documentation and evaluation criterion.

The authorities have to reduce the risk of hearing loss for less social and insurance cost: the hearing loss is still near the 60% of the industrial occupational diseases (*INAIL Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni sugli Infortuni sul Lavoro*); the Ministry of Health (Ministero della Sanità) through the "*ISPESL*", the Higher institute for occupational safety and prevention, is preparing a "guide line" to reduce the differences on noise evaluations and to organize a standard report.

As the controls are not planned uniformly in Italy, not every body checks the personal noise exposure and, as well known, this law is difficult to be respected, not only for a lack of control, but because the employers don't see the long term benefit of an ergonomic environment in face of a short term cost.

2 - CONCLUSION

On my personal experiences, I think that the application of the law against the occupational hearing loss in Italy can have a positive evolution only if the political authorities decide to organize a new advertising campaign followed by a well planned inspection of all working environment.