

Participatory strategies for work equipment design

The TUTB and SALTSA¹ are currently running a project on *“Trade Union Strategies for Improving Mandated European Technical Standards”* which will conclude in June 2003.

The project falls into three main phases. The first two are essentially reporting – updating existing issues around trade union participation in the standardisation process, and the impact of globalisation on standardization. Phase three is the exploratory stage of the project, researching into new participatory strategies.

The project's research focus will establish best practice in the participatory design of equipment EU-wide, and will offer a systematic collection of end-user knowledge on the design process. As part of this, the TUTB will collect case studies and associated methods where workers have had a say in designing or improving the equipment and machinery they use, or have influenced a specification and selection process.

The first aim of the research is to prove that participatory methods and information from end-users can improve machinery design. The second is to achieve broader leverage over the design of various machines by feeding this information into the standardization process.

In order to build up strong, case-based arguments as to why operator data should be systematically used in the CEN process, projects that have led to changes in the requirements of working equipment technical standards will also be included in the research. At the same time, appropriate methods for collecting and analysing these data will be suggested to demonstrate the feasibility of the proposal.

In this project, the TUTB is co-operating with national trade union affiliates, Nottingham University's Institute for Occupational Ergonomics, Bordeaux I University's Ergonomics laboratory (LAP/ ADS), TNO's Ergonomics innovation team, and the Finish Institute for Occupational Health.

The TUTB - SALTSA project comes as a follow-up to two previous pilot projects on participatory processes set up by the TUTB some years ago in Sweden and Italy. The first of these was run in collaboration with the Swedish Trade Union Confederation and the Swedish Wood Industry Workers Union in 1997. Information on users' experience of woodworking machines was collected by means of questionnaires. At the end, safety delegates successfully identified technical shortcomings in the design of the machines examined, and a

number of ergonomic improvements were suggested.

The second pilot study was carried out in 1999 in Tuscany (Italy) in collaboration with SindNova and the Local Health Authority Unit (USL), (see our article above).

Main outcomes

The case studies on participatory design of work equipment will be included in national reports that will be discussed in a workshop held in Brussels in June 2002.

The national reports will be analysed and presented in a consolidated final report to be published in early 2003.

A conference to present the results of the project will be staged in 2003.

The coordinator of the project at the TUTB is Theoni Koukoulaki, tkoukoul@etuc.org
Further information on our web site :
www.etuc.org/tutb/uk/standard-participation.html

¹ *The Joint Programme for Working Life Research in a European Perspective* is an undertaking by the Swedish Trade Unions LO, SACO and TCO and the National Institute for Working Life.