

The new Blue Guide: what does it mean for you?

A key European Union document on implementing directives has been updated recently. As Gambica technical executive Andy Evans* explains, the document has important implications for some of the major directives that affect the industrial sector.

The "Blue Guide" (so-called because it has a blue front page) is the European Commission's official Guide to the implementation of directives based on the New Approach and the Global Approach. It is freely available from the Commission's Web site (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/single-market-goods/files/blue-guide/guidepublic_en.pdf)

The guide has been revised recently to take into account the New Legislative Framework (NLF). After many industry comments had been taken into account, the new edition was published in March 2014.

New Approach directives are based on the principle that only products fulfilling essential requirements may be placed on the market and put into service. Harmonised standards – the reference numbers of which have been published in the EU's Official Journal and which have been transposed into national standards – are presumed to conform to the corresponding essential requirements, and that harmonisation is limited to essential requirements.

The new Blue Guide is a comprehensive publication running to more than 200 pages and covers the scope of the New Approach directives, manufacturers' responsibilities, compliance with directives, conformity assessment procedures, notified bodies, CE marking, market surveillance and external aspects.

Gambica is happy to report that the

European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO) and the Technical Harmonisation Working Party (THWP) of the Council of the European Union, have reached a tri-partite agreement (Decision 768/2008) on the alignment of eight Directives including the Low Voltage Directive (LVD), the Atex (explosive atmospheres) directive and the EMC (Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive).

Gambica has been "shouting loudly" on behalf of its members to ensure that concerns about industrial products are heard in Brussels above the white noise of well-understood consumer products. This appears to have paid off with a number of industry-friendly horizontal compromises across all directives, including agreements that:

- a single EU Declaration of Conformity can be in the form of a "dossier" of several individual Declarations of Conformity;
- distributors will be able to supply products placed on the market – stock that is already in the distribution chain – before the date of application of national measures transposing each Directive;
- there is no obligation for a "unique identification number of the product" on the Declarations of Conformity; and
- if necessary, the Declaration of Conformity may include a colour image of sufficient clarity for the product's identification.

Manufacturers of industrial automation equipment will be interested, in particular, in the following positive points regarding specific Directives:

- The Low Voltage Directive now protects only persons, domestic animals and property, while guaranteeing the functioning of the internal market. All provisions referring to "vulnerable consumers" are deleted.
- In the Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) directive, the current definition of

electromagnetic disturbance has been re-inserted to refer to any electromagnetic phenomenon which may degrade the performance of equipment, including electromagnetic noise, an unwanted signal, or a change in the propagation medium itself.

■ In the Atex (equipment for explosive atmospheres) Directive, the current order of CE marking, the identification number of the Notified Body, and further markings such as that of explosion protection, have been restored (article 16). Also, manufacturers are not obliged to provide supporting evidence for the adequacy of the technical design solution under EU-type examination (Annex III).

All eight NLF Directives were published on 29 March, 2014. They do not come into force until 20 April, 2016. The harmonised standards have all been published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The amendments to the Directives are generally seen as industry-friendly, in that there should be no (or very little) extra administrative burden on manufacturers.

One of the main aims of the New Approach is to improve market surveillance, which is for the benefit of all law-abiding manufacturers by levelling the playing field across Europe through the enforcement of the Directives. After all, what is the point in manufacturers incurring the cost of compliance if some can get away without doing so? ■



* Gambica is the trade association for the automation, control, instrumentation and laboratory technology sectors in the UK. For more information on the Blue Guide, please contact Andy Evans via aevans@gambica.org.uk www.gambica.org.uk