

Protection of workers from asbestos

2022/0298(COD) - 28/04/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the report by Véronique TRILLET-LENOIR (Renew Europe, FR) on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2009/148/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work.

The committee responsible recommended that the European Parliament's position adopted at first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure should amend the proposal as follows:

Occupational exposure limit (OEL)

The report noted that taking into account the relevant scientific expertise and the need to increase the protection of workers at Union level, a revised OEL, equal to 0.001 fibres/cm³ as an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA), should be established. That revised OEL should apply after a transitional period. Until four years after the date of entry into force of this Directive, a transitional OEL, equal to 0.01 fibres/cm³ as an 8-hour TWA, should apply. Such an approach is underpinned by a public health objective aiming at the necessary safe removal of asbestos and the need to take into account technical considerations with regard to monitoring compliance.

Removal techniques

The report stated that the safe removal and disposal of asbestos-containing materials should be a priority, because repair, maintenance, encapsulation or sealing lead to the postponement of removal, which can perpetuate the risks to the workers and occupants of the buildings concerned for many years.

The encapsulation and sealing of asbestos-containing materials which can technically be removed should be prohibited, while not putting poorer households at a disadvantage because of their inability to afford necessary renovations. Appropriate accompanying measures are therefore needed.

In that regard, the Union provides significant funding, in particular through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, to be used to support national measures for the removal of asbestos in the context of renovations. Where asbestos is not removed, the relevant structures should be identified, registered and regularly monitored.

Updated list of diseases

The report suggested updating the Annex to Directive 2009/148/EC related to the medical surveillance of workers in light of current knowledge on diseases that can be caused by asbestos exposure. When it is demonstrated that a disease is linked to occupational exposure to asbestos, the information should be used to feed statistical registers to ensure more complete epidemiological monitoring.

Current knowledge indicates that exposure to free asbestos fibres can give rise to at least the following diseases: lung carcinoma; carcinoma of the larynx; carcinoma of the ovary; non-malignant pleural diseases.

Training

Members included a new Annex on the minimum requirements for training. Workers who are, or who are likely to be, exposed to dust from asbestos or asbestos containing materials should receive mandatory training.

The training should be adapted as closely as possible to the characteristics of the profession.