Protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work

2025/0232(COD) - 18/07/2025 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to strengthen worker protection against hazardous chemicals.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: in June 2021, the Commission presented the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027, which aims to turn Principle 10 of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** on the right of workers to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work into concrete actions.

Cancer remains the leading cause of work-related deaths in the EU. It is estimated that around **80 000 people in the EU** lose their lives each year due to exposure to carcinogens at work. This highlights the need to further improve the prevention of work-related diseases in the EU.

The Commission's proposed sixth revision of Directive 2004/37/EC on carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic agents (CMRD 6) is the result of an extensive consultation process with social partners, the European Chemicals Agency's Committee for Risk Assessment, and the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work. The EU has already adopted five revisions of the CMRD, covering more than 40 key hazardous chemicals and helping to save the lives of more than 100 000 workers over the next 50 years.

CMRD 6 responds to requests made by the European Parliament and the Council in the context of the fourth revision of the CMRD (CMRD 4) to achieve new or revised occupational exposure limits (OELs) for at least 25 substances.

CONTENT: with the **sixth revision of the CMRD** , the Commission proposes to set exposure limits for cobalt and inorganic cobalt compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and 1,4-dioxane. Welding fumes are also added under the CMRD.

Cobalt and inorganic compounds

The proposed limit is 0.01 mg/m3 for particles that can be breathed in through the nose and mouth, and 0.0025 mg/m3 for finer particles that can reach deeper into the lungs. The transitional limits (0.02 mg/m3 and 0.0042 mg/m3) give industries six years to adapt.

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)

The proposed new limit value is 0.00007 mg/m3. To help the most affected sectors adapt, a temporary limit of 0.00014 mg/m3 will apply for six years after the directive comes into force.

1,4-dioxane

The proposed general limit is 7.3 mg/m3 with a short-term exposure limit of 73 mg/m3. A biological limit is also suggested.

In addition to setting these exposure limits, the Commission proposes "notations," which warn employers and workers of possible exposure through the skin or other means and indicate when additional protective measures are necessary.

Welding fumes

Welding fumes can contain harmful substances such as chromium, nickel, and cadmium compounds, which are classified as carcinogens. The proposal plans to include welding fumes in the CMRD.

This initiative also includes an amendment to correct the existing entry on **mercury** and divalent inorganic mercury compounds in Annex III to fully align the term used for this substance with the scope of the CMRD.

Overall, the Commission estimates that the preferred options should **prevent 1 676 cases of lung cancer** and 18 912 non-cancerous cases over 40 years.