

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

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the report by Liesbet SOMMEN (EPP, BE) on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2004/37/EC as regards the addition of substances and setting limit values in its Annexes I, III and IIIa.

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:

Definitions

Members proposed to introduce the definition of 'hazardous medicinal products' to mean medicinal products that contain one or more substances that meet the criteria for classification as a category 1A or 1B carcinogen, mutagen or reprotoxic as set out in Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008.

Use of personal protective equipment

To improve the protection of workers, Members added an obligation for employers to provide personal protective equipment, such as respiratory protective devices, when residual exposure cannot be reduced to levels below the limit values, which need to be adjusted to a worker's body-type. When wearing them, workers should have the right to regular breaks in contamination-free areas.

New exposure limit values

Union-wide data from work-related health problems due to exposure to cobalt and its inorganic compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, isoprene and 1,4-dioxane are often absent, unreliable or insufficient. The Commission should develop guidelines and recommendations for data collection by the Member States to improve the reporting and exposures registries.

In this regard, Members backed new limit values for cobalt and its inorganic compounds, used for battery production, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, used in steel, iron and aluminium production, and 1,4-dioxane, used for chemical and textile production. They also supported the addition of welding fumes.

Isoprene

Members included a long-term occupational exposure limit value for isoprene (used in the chemical and rubber producing industry), which they say meets the criteria for classification as carcinogenic. Exposure to isoprene can cause irritation to the nose, throat, and lungs, and chronic and high exposure may lead to liver cancer and anaemia. While for the time being the exposure of workers is still low, a binding occupational exposure limit for isoprene is nevertheless needed to prevent potential risks arising in the future and to secure a level-playing field across Members States. Members proposed to establish this limit value at 8.5 mg/m³ (3 ppm).

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)

Members stressed that this revision should strengthen the protection of firefighters against polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

Aircraft engine exhaust emissions

Workers in several sectors, including aviation ground operations, may be exposed to aircraft engine exhaust emissions (“jet exhaust”), a complex mixture of ultrafine particles and hazardous substances. It is therefore necessary to accelerate scientific assessment and move towards establishing an occupational exposure limit value for aircraft engine exhaust emissions.

Support for small and medium sized businesses

To support small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) with the implementation of the directive, Members proposed that Member States should monitor and report the effects of the implementation of the legislation on SMEs, including specific measures such as financial and technical support.

Evaluation

In addition to the necessary preventive measures provided in this directive, the Commission should, no later than 12 months after the entry into force of this directive, consult the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) on the need to update its Recommendation (EU) 2022/2337 on the European schedule of occupational diseases, with a view to encouraging Member States to introduce enhanced prevention measures at the occupational level and provisions allowing for better compensation for conditions suspected to be linked to occupational exposure in certain professions.