

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

2025/0232(COD) - 06/10/2026 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 499 votes to 49, with 104 abstentions, a legislative resolution 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 European Parliament adopted its position at first reading by amending the Commission's proposal as follows:

New exposure limit values

This sixth revision of Directive 2004/37/EC on carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic agents includes new exposure limit values for cobalt and inorganic cobalt compounds (used in battery production), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons - PAHs (used in steel, iron and aluminium production), 1,4-dioxane and isoprene.

Regarding **cobalt**, the amended text stressed that it is a hazardous metal that poses serious health risks to workers (respiratory problems, heart, thyroid, liver, or kidney damage, and potential cancers), and whose consumption is expected to increase by approximately 330% by 2050 due to the energy transition. Occupational exposure limits for cobalt and inorganic cobalt compounds are therefore necessary to help prevent long-term effects on workers' health and well-being and to support the attractiveness, competitiveness, and long-term viability of the cobalt industry in the Union, while also preventing the relocation of cobalt processing companies to third countries where occupational safety and health regulations are less stringent.

With regard to **polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon mixtures of PAHs**, it is anticipated that it will be difficult for some sectors to comply in the short term with a limit value of 0.00007 mg/m³ (measured as benzo[a]pyrene). Therefore, a **seven-year** transitional period is planned after the entry into force of this Directive, during which the limit value of 0.00014 mg/m³ (measured as benzo[a]pyrene) shall apply.

Since **1,4-dioxane** meets the criteria for classification as a category 1B carcinogen in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008, it is planned to establish a long-term and a short-term OEL value of 7.3 mg/m³ (2 ppm) and 73 mg/m³ (20 ppm), respectively, supplemented by a skin notation, as well as a biological limit value of 45 mg HEAA in urine/g creatinine, measured at the end of exposure or shift in accordance with national law or practice.

The updated legislation also sets a long-term occupational exposure limit value of 8.5 mg/m³ (3 ppm) for **isoprene** (used in the chemical and rubber producing industry), as this substance meets the criteria for classification as carcinogen.

Welding fumes

The European Commission should assess the need to set additional limit values for substances contained in welding fumes.

Personal protective equipment

Where, despite putting in place preventative measures, exposure cannot be avoided or adequately reduced by other means, personal protective equipment (PPE) should be used as a last resort to **ensure that workers are adequately protected** and, in any case, to avoid exposure exceeding established limit values. PPE should be correctly chosen, individually adjusted to fit the wearer, and maintained.

When wearing personal protective equipment, workers should be entitled to regular breaks in an area where there is no risk of contamination by carcinogens, mutagens or reprotoxic substances. The duration and frequency of the breaks should be determined by taking into account the assessment of the risks to safety and health at work.

Firefighters

The amended text underlined the importance of firefighters and other emergency services personnel assessing and reducing the risk of exposure to carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances with a view to strengthening the protection of firefighters and other emergency services personnel against, inter alia, PAHs thereby reducing the risk of occupational diseases.

Training

The amended text emphasised the need for workers to receive sufficient and appropriate training, on the basis of all available information, when they are exposed to, or are likely to be exposed to, carcinogens, mutagens or reprotoxic substances, including those contained in certain hazardous medicinal products. Furthermore, Member States should maintain equal protection for all workers and facilitate the compliance of SMEs, including microenterprises, with the obligations stemming from Directive 2004/37/EC.

Lastly, it is essential that the ordinary legislative procedure be used to set binding limit values under Directive 2004/37/EC because amending that Directive is not a matter for technical consideration alone but also requires a political assessment.