

Council issues disappointing position ignoring the threats posed by asbestos

On 8th December 2022, the Council announced its position for the triologue negotiations on the revision of the directive protecting workers from risks related to asbestos exposure. The Council focuses on the revision of the exposure limit value and the measuring method, just like the European Commission did in September 2022 by proposing a review of the Directive, which set a dangerously high maximum exposure level of 10,000 asbestos fibres/m³.

The proposed Commission review represents a step backwards compared to the ambitious report on Asbestos adopted in October 2021 by the European Parliament, which reflected the ETUC and EFBWW demand for a new limit of 1,000 fibres/m³.

The Council not only missed to take over the proposals of the European Parliament for a lower limit value, but it also missed to follow the holistic view of the Parliament's proposal, especially in connection with the Renovation Wave.

We need urgently a ban on the practice to seal or encapsulate asbestos. Equally, the misleading concept of 'sporadic and low intensity' exposure must be taken out from the Directive. Having sometimes a very high level of background exposure, the scope of the Directive needs to be extended to all workers possibly exposed.

Due to the "Renovation Wave" even more workers will be carrying out work on roofs, heating systems, windows, and bathrooms, and will potentially get exposed to asbestos-contaminated materials. ETUC and EFBWW are disappointed about the limited scope and lack of ambition regarding safety linked to the Renovation Wave, which will increase exposure of workers and citizens to asbestos. Proper training for asbestos workers as well as for all professions potentially exposed to Asbestos, as proposed by the Parliament, is crucial.

We call on the Parliament, as one of the co-legislators, to stand firm in the upcoming negotiations, defending the holistic and ambitious report that was almost unanimously adopted in October 2021, with support from all political groups.

Tom Deleu, General Secretary at the EFBWW:

"The position of the Council is a great disappointment. The construction workers that are at the heart of the Renovation Wave will continue to be dangerously exposed to asbestos. The limit value must be reduced more substantially to 1,000 fibres/m³ as proposed by the European Parliament and trade unions. The example from the Netherlands, which has a standard of 2,000 fibres/m³, shows it can be done. And it should be done!"

ETUC Deputy General Secretary Claes-Mikael Stahl said:

"The only positive element of the Council's proposal is that it calls on member states to use an accurate measurement system. "The Council is playing fast and loose with the lives of hardworking

people by choosing to support an asbestos exposure limit which is ten times higher than that recommended by workplace health experts.

“There should be no half measures when it comes to the number one cause of occupational cancer in Europe. The only responsible thing to do when it comes to occupational cancer is to follow the science.

"The ball is now on the court of the European Parliament to improve the protection of workers exposed to asbestos."