

Protection of workers from carcinogens or mutagens at work: Exposure limit values

The European Commission proposes to amend Directive 2004/37/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive, CMD) by expanding its scope and by including and/or revising occupational exposure limit values for 13 cancer- and mutation-causing chemicals. Parliament is due to vote on the proposal during the October II plenary.

Background

Cancer is the leading cause (53 %) of work-related deaths in the EU. The most common types of occupational cancer are lung cancer, mesothelioma (linked to asbestos exposure) and bladder cancer. The World Health Organization estimates that ten per cent of lung cancer deaths are closely related to workplace risks. Work-related cancers may be prevented, by reducing or eliminating exposure to certain carcinogens or mutagens. The CMD sets general minimum requirements for employers, such as: assessing exposure risks for workers; preventing exposure; substitution or, if not possible, use in a closed system; and ensuring limit values are not exceeded.

European Commission proposal

With its [proposal](#) of 13 May 2016, the Commission plans to bring within the scope of the CMD a number of chemical agents not yet classified under the current EU system; establish EU-wide exposure limits for a further 10 substances; and revise two of the three existing limit values. The aim, according to the Commission, is to improve workers' health protection, increase the effectiveness of the EU framework and promote clarity for economic operators. The Commission plans to proceed in steps, with this proposal being the first.

European Parliament position

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) adopted its report on 28 February 2017. The main amendments include: reprotoxins (substances toxic to reproduction) should be brought within the scope of the CMD; further amendments of the CMD should include additional substances; stricter limit values should be set for three of the substances (respirable crystalline silica, chromium VI compounds and wood dust); and life-long health surveillance of exposed workers should be ensured.

On 28 June 2017, the Parliament and the Council reached a provisional [agreement](#) on the proposal, which was approved by the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee on 11 July. The main changes to the proposal in the compromise text are: the Commission undertakes to assess the possibility of including reprotoxins in the scope of the CMD by the first quarter of 2019; exposure limits for chromium VI and hardwood dust will be tightened; the Commission will assess the need to modify the limit value for respirable crystalline silica as part of the next evaluation of the CMD's implementation; and health surveillance of workers may continue for as long as needed to safeguard health. On 30 August, EMPL endorsed the provisional agreement with 42 votes in favour, none against and 8 abstentions. The text is due to be the subject of a first-reading vote during the October II plenary session.

First-reading report: [2016/0130\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: EMPL; Rapporteur: Marita Ulvskog (S&D, Sweden). For further information, see our '[EU Legislation in progress](#)' briefing'.

