



Commission welcomes political agreement to better protect workers against lead and diisocyanates exposure

Brussels, 15 November 2023

The Commission welcomes the political agreement reached yesterday between the European Parliament and the Council on the Commission's proposal to amend two Directives: for lead, the [Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances at work](#), and for lead and diisocyanates, the [Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work](#).

The update will **improve workers' protection from the health risks** linked to the exposure to dangerous chemicals: **lead and diisocyanates**. In the case of lead, significantly reduced exposure limits will help prevent health issues of workers, for example affecting reproductive functions and foetal development. For diisocyanates, new exposure limits will prevent cases of occupational asthma and other respiratory diseases.

This agreement marks an important step toward implementing the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) as regards occupational safety and health, as well as the [EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work for 2021-2027](#) to further reduce workers' exposure to hazardous chemicals.

As part of the agreement, there will also be guidelines supporting Member States to implement the two amended Directives, for instance as regards protection of women of childbearing age or as regards combined exposure to mixtures of substances. The agreement also adds clarifications as regards data collection on lead exposure, the support to be given to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and microenterprises to comply with the rules.

After the formal approval of the agreement by the European Parliament and the Council, Member States will have two years to incorporate the EU Directive into national law.

Background

The Commission's proposal was the result of an extensive consultation process, including a two-stage consultation with social partners, and of close collaboration with scientists and representatives of workers, employers, and Member States.

It follows up on the commitments made in the EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027, where the Commission announced a proposal for limit values for lead and diisocyanates. It also stems from the fourth revision of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive in March 2022, which extended its scope to reprotoxic substances, which affect reproductive functions. This proposal brings lead under the scope of the now Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive.

Lead accounts for around half of all occupational exposures to reprotoxic substances. Approximately 300 cases of ill-health occur annually in the EU due to past exposure to lead. Exposure occurs in the mining and primary processing of lead, and its subsequent use in products such as batteries. In addition, workers can be exposed to lead due to, for example, its historical application in renovations, waste collection, recycling, and environmental remediation.

Occupational exposure to diisocyanates accounts for 9% to 15% of all occupational asthma cases in adults of working age. Peak exposure (meaning short duration, high intensity) is a key contributor to developing asthma. This is why in addition to a general occupational exposure limit, a short-term exposure limit is proposed. Work-related exposure to diisocyanates occurs primarily in the manufacturing of polyurethane, which is used for products such as foams, plastics, coatings, varnishes, two-pack paints, and adhesives.

Since there are currently no limit values for diisocyanates, there will be a transitional period until 31 December 2028 to support businesses with implementation.

Follow Nicolas Schmit on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Subscribe to the Commission's [newsletter on employment, social affairs and inclusion](#).

IP/23/5789

Quotes:

"The health and safety of workers is essential and non-negotiable. The agreement reached on these two directives will increase the protection of workers from the health risks posed by exposure to lead and diisocyanates. Another promise delivered from the EU strategic framework on occupational safety and health."
Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights - 15/11/2023

Press contacts:

[Veerle NUYTS](#) (+32 2 299 63 02)

[Flora MATTHAES](#) (+32 2 298 39 51)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)