

EPSU calls on the Commission to stop asbestos deaths



(22 March 2022) EPSU believes that we need a binding legislative initiative at EU level and we urge the European Commission to move forward with a comprehensive legislative package to protect workers from asbestos. Firefighters and emergency services are exposed to asbestos and other carcinogens and their health and safety must be protected. A revision of the directive on the protection of workers from asbestos is urgent and must be considering the different angles. Therefore, we call for a directive on protecting asbestos at work, included in a broader legislative package (a framework directive that would include registers; a proposal on occupational diseases; on asbestos screening before renovation and on screening before renting or selling).

We remind the Commission that according to the latest scientific medical research and recommendations, there is no threshold under which asbestos fibre air concentration is harmless and protection of any worker coming into contact with asbestos fiber is of a vital matter.

Therefore, we call for a comprehensive but precise package that would legislate on and for:

- all activities in which workers are or may be exposed in the course of their work to dust arising from asbestos or materials containing asbestos; this includes firefighters and emergency services that are called to intervene on sites that may be contaminated or exposed to asbestos. This must not be limited to operation areas and for the length of the operation but include decontamination in the fire stations.
 - to provide access to firefighter and emergency services to asbestos databases
 - to include all at-risk professions, including renovation and demolition workers, waste managers, miners and firefighters, in the national implementation of that Directive;
 - workers can be contaminated not only by breathing but also by ingesting and via skin absorption. The legislation must include minimum standards for protection but also decontamination, both for equipment and infrastructure. Records of exposures must be stored for at least 40 years.
 - reduce the occupational limit value of 1 000 fibres/m³ (0,001 fibres/cm³)
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