

Ms Ursula Von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
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Dear President,

Occupational cancer is the first cause of work-related deaths in the EU, with as much as 78% of recognised occupational cancers related to asbestos. In 2019 alone, more than 70,000 people in the EU died from past exposure to asbestos at work. Local and Regional Governments employ many workers that are exposed to asbestos.

Firefighters and emergency services, for example, are exposed to asbestos fibres every time they intervene in an explosion, fire, collapse of a building containing asbestos. Mostly the presence of asbestos is unknown, as there are no accessible registers with these data. Waste workers are exposed during the disposal phase. The EU will have to engage in a massive process of asbestos removal and renovation wave to reach its objectives of greening the Union. As Local and Regional Governments we are fully committed to move towards a greener and asbestos-free Union and as employers and unions in Local and Regional Governments we believe that, in order to achieve these objective, Local and Regional Governments and Social Partners in Local and Regional Governments must be involved in all steps of the process, at all levels.

At this end, we underline the need of the establishment of national registries on asbestos, that we call the EU Commission to include them in the promised legislative initiative on the screening of asbestos in building, that we urge to publish. These registers must be drawn at national level and be easily and fully accessible by all Local and Regional Governments and emergency services. Moreover, alongside prevention it is important to protect those workers that have been exposed and recognise the risks for their health, with a stronger acknowledgement of all asbestos-related occupational diseases. We also stress the challenges that Local and Regional Governments are facing due to lack of resources and, as Local and Regional Governments social partners we call for adequate funding from national government in order to be able to adequately fund local emergency services, to both respond to the current emergencies but also to adapt to the changing needs emerging from the climate crisis. This would include funding and measures to provide trainings and ensure availability of personal protective equipment.

Adequate and sufficient protective personal equipment is important in a context of increasing exposure to carcinogens following the repeated forest fires during heatwaves. The level of exposure to carcinogens for firefighters is so high that on 1 July 2022, the IARC WHO classified occupational exposure as a firefighter as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1).

We remain at your disposal for any further discussion on this matter,

Best regards,



Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary



Fabrizio Rossi
CEMR Secretary General