

More protection for workers: Council agrees to reduce the exposure to 5 carcinogens

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The EU is taking further steps to protect workers from exposure to carcinogens. The Council today adopted its position (general approach) on a proposal which will update the existing rules on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (Directive 2004/37/EC). The aim of the proposal, which was presented by the Commission in April this year, is to reduce the exposure levels for 5 carcinogenic chemical agents – cadmium, beryllium, arsenic acid, formaldehyde and 4,4'-Methylene-bis(2-chloroaniline) (MOCA).

Estimates show that this proposal, when adopted, would in the longer term improve working conditions for over 1 000 000 workers in the EU and should prevent more than 22 000 cases of work-related ill-health. It is a very good example of how the EU is taking concrete steps to protect its citizens.

Beate Hartinger-Klein, Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection of Austria.

The proposal, including Council's proposed amendments, sets the following new limits which are in line with new scientific and technical data and evidenced-based practices for measuring exposure levels at the workplace:

- cadmium – 0,001 mg/m³. This value will apply after a 7-year transitional period during which the limit value 0,004 mg/m³ should apply;
- beryllium – 0,0002 mg/m³. This value will apply after a 5-year transitional period during which the limit value 0,0006 mg/m³ should apply;
- arsenic acid – 0,01 mg/m³. This value will apply for the copper smelting sector after a 2-year transitional period;
- formaldehyde – 0,37 mg/m³ for 8-hour exposure and 0,74 mg/m³ for a short term exposure. These limit values will apply after a 3-year transitional period;
- MOCA – 0,01 mg/m³ with a skin notation to indicate possible dermal

uptake.

With regard to cadmium the Commission shall assess no later than five years from the entry into force of the Directive the option of a further amendment to Directive 2004/37/EC which would add the combination of an airborne occupational exposure limit with a biological limit value. The proposal also allows Member States to introduce at national level more stringent binding limit values and does not prevent them from applying additional measures, such as a biological limit value.

Next steps

The agreement reached by the Council will serve as the basis for negotiations with the European Parliament.

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