



Commission launches new initiative to improve health and safety of workers

Brussels, 10 January 2017

Today the European Commission is taking action to promote Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in the EU.

Investment in occupational health and safety improves people's lives by preventing accidents and work-related illness. Building on past efforts, the Commission's new initiative aims to better protect workers against work-related cancer, to help businesses, in particular SME's and micro-enterprises, in their efforts to comply with the existing legislative framework, and to put a bigger focus on results and less on paperwork.

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said: *"Today we present a clear action plan for sound occupational safety and health at the workplace in the 21st century with rules that are clear, up-to-date and effectively applied on the ground. We also deliver on our commitment to fight work-related cancer, by addressing exposure to seven more cancer-causing chemicals which will improve protection of some 4 million workers in Europe. We join forces with Member States and stakeholders to create a healthy and safe workplace for all."*

Over the last 25 years, when the first Directive was agreed at EU level in this field, the EU has been a front-runner in high standards of worker protection against health and safety risks at work. Since 2008, the number of workers who died in an accident at work dropped by almost one fourth, and the percentage of EU workers reporting at least one health problem caused or made worse by work decreased by nearly 10%. However, the challenges remain large: it is estimated that about 160 000 Europeans die from illnesses related to their work every year. Keeping workers safe and healthy in the workplace by safeguarding and updating the high European standards is a top priority.

Following up on its commitment to continue to improve occupational health and safety, the Commission will undertake the following key actions:

- **Set exposure limits** or other measures **for another seven cancer-causing chemicals**. This proposal will not only benefit workers' health, but also sets a clear objective for employers and enforcement authorities to avoid exposure.
- **Help businesses, notably small and micro enterprises, in their efforts to comply with health and safety rules**. In particular, evidence shows that 1 in 3 micro enterprises does not assess workplace risks. Today, we therefore published a guidance paper for employers with practical tips aimed at facilitating their risk assessment and at making it more effective. It includes advice on how to deal with rapidly increasing OSH risks such as psychosocial, ergonomic or ageing related-risks. We also aim to increase the availability of free online tools that help small and microenterprises in conducting risk assessments.
- The Commission will **work with Member States and social partners to remove or update outdated rules within the next two years**. The aim is to simplify and reduce administrative burden, while maintaining workers' protection. This modernisation should also support better enforcement on the ground.

The review of the EU OSH legislation and the changes to the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive fit within the Commission's ongoing work on establishing a [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), which aims to adapt EU legislation to changing work patterns and society. The consultations and debates on the Pillar have confirmed the importance of occupational health and safety at work as a cornerstone of the EU acquis and put an emphasis on prevention and enforcement. The Communication adopted today also follows up on broad evaluation of the existing "acquis", as part of the Regulatory Fitness and Performance Program (REFIT) exercise which aims at making EU legislation simpler, more relevant and effective. The proposal and changes were developed in close consultation with stakeholders at all levels, notably social partners.

Background

In 2012, the Commission started a comprehensive evaluation of the EU OSH legislation (the [Framework Directive](#) and 23 related Directives). This evaluation was part of the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance Program (REFIT) and aimed to make EU legislation simpler, more

relevant and effective.

A specific priority of the Commission in the field of OSH is the fight against cancer, as the first cause of work-related deaths in the EU. The Commission is addressing this as a priority challenge: on 13 May 2016 it proposed [measures to reduce exposure of European workers to 13 cancer-causing chemicals](#), by proposing changes to the [Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive \(2004/37/EC\)](#). Today the Commission follows up on its political commitment with a second proposal to address exposure to seven more priority chemicals. The Commission will keep looking into other carcinogens to continue protecting workers and improving business conditions across the EU.

For more information

[Frequently asked questions on workers' protection from cancer-causing chemicals](#)

[Frequently asked questions on new policy on health and safety at work](#)

[Commission Staff Working Document - Ex-post evaluation of OHS Directive](#)

[Commission Staff Working Document - A practical guidance for employers](#)

[News item on DG Employment website](#)

Follow Marianne Thyssen on [Facebook](#) and [twitter](#)

Subscribe to the European Commission's free e-mail [newsletter on employment, social affairs and inclusion](#)

IP/17/2

Press contacts:

[Christian WIGAND](#) (+32 2 296 22 53)

[Melanie VOIN](#) (+ 32 2 295 86 59)

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