



Commission improves protection of workers with new chemical exposure limits

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The European Commission has proposed strengthened protections for workers against hazardous chemicals. This is expected **to prevent about 1,700 lung cancer cases and 19,000 other illnesses**, including restrictive lung disease and damage to the liver and kidneys, over the next 40 years. In the sixth revision of the [Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic substances Directive \(CMRD\)](#), the Commission recommends setting exposure limits for cobalt and inorganic cobalt compounds, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons ('PAHs') and 1,4-dioxane. Welding fumes are also added under the scope of the CMRD.

These new measures could save up to €1.16 billion in healthcare costs and significantly improve the quality of life for workers and their families.

This revision to the CMRD reflects the latest scientific data and benefits from input provided by the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work, composed of representatives of workers, employers and governments.

New exposure limits to better protect workers

To ensure safer workplaces, the Commission proposes new exposure limit values for:

- **Cobalt and inorganic compounds**, which are commonly used in battery production, particularly for electric vehicles, and manufacturing processes for magnets and hard metals. The proposed limit is 0.01 mg/m³ for particles that can be breathed in through the nose and mouth, and 0.0025 mg/m³ for finer particles that can reach deeper into the lungs. Transitional limits (0.02 mg/m³ and 0,0042 mg/m³) give industries six years to adapt.
- **Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)**: PAHs are typically found in industries like steel, iron and aluminium production and are also present in welding fumes. The proposed new limit value is 0.00007 mg/m³. To help the most affected sectors adapt, a temporary limit twice as high will apply for six years after the Directive takes effect.
- **1,4-dioxane**: This substance is commonly used as a solvent in chemical and textile production, and in household detergents. The proposed general limit is 7.3 mg/m³ with a short-term exposure limit of 73 mg/m³. A biological limit is also suggested.

Along with setting these exposure limits, the Commission proposes "notations," alerting employers and workers about possible exposure through the skin or other means and indicating when extra protective measures are needed.

Inclusion of welding fumes

Welding fumes may contain harmful substances like chromium, nickel, and cadmium compounds, which are classified as carcinogens. By adding welding fumes to the CMRD, the Commission establishes clearer legal guidelines and mandates protective measures to enhance workers' safety and foster a healthier and safer work environment.

Next steps

The Commission's proposal will now be discussed by the European Parliament and the Council. Once adopted, Member States will have two years to incorporate the Directive into national law.

Background

The Commission's proposed sixth revision of the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic substances

Directive 2004/37/EC2 (CMRD) is the result of an extensive consultation process with social partners, the European Chemicals Agency's Risk Assessment Committee, and the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work. Building on five previous CMRD revisions, addressing more than 40 key hazardous chemicals and helping to save the lives of over 100,000 workers over the next 50 years, it underscores the EU's commitment to protecting workers' health and safety.

The proposal follows up on the commitments made in the [EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027](#) and supports the goals outlined in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) on occupational health and safety. In addition, it contributes to [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#) and the European Health Union.

For More Information

[Proposal](#)

[Annex to the proposal](#)

[Impact assessment](#)

[EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work](#)

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Quote(s):

"This revision of the Carcinogens, Mutagens, and Reprotoxic Substances Directive reflects our commitment to safe and healthy European workplace, the backbone of quality jobs, and our dedication to science-based policy. By introducing exposure limits on hazardous chemicals such as cobalt, PAHs, and 1,4-dioxane, we are not only protecting workers today but investing in their long-term wellbeing."

Roxana Minzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness

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