



Commission acts to better protect people from asbestos and ensure an asbestos-free future

Brussels, 28 September 2022

Asbestos is a highly dangerous, cancer-causing substance that is still present in many of our buildings and is responsible for many avoidable deaths in the EU. Today, the Commission presents a comprehensive approach to better protect people and the environment from asbestos and ensure an asbestos-free future.

The package includes:

- A [Communication on working towards an asbestos-free future](#), tackling asbestos in a comprehensive way, from improving diagnoses and treatment of diseases caused by asbestos, to identification and safe removal and waste treatment of asbestos; and
- A [proposal to amend the Asbestos at Work Directive](#) to improve workers' protection by significantly lowering the occupational exposure limit to asbestos.

Although all forms of asbestos are banned in the EU since 2005, asbestos remains present in older buildings. It poses a health threat, particularly when materials containing asbestos are disturbed and fibres are released and inhaled, for instance during renovations.

As much as 78% of occupational cancers recognised in the Member States are related to asbestos. When inhaled, airborne asbestos fibres can lead, for example, to mesothelioma and lung cancer, with an average lag of 30 years between exposure and the first signs of disease.

Therefore, addressing the health risks of exposure to asbestos is essential to protect people's health and the environment, while ensuring decent living and working conditions. This is even more relevant in the context of the green transition and our EU ambition to [increase the renovation rate](#) of buildings. Renovations will improve the health and living conditions for residents, and reduce their energy bills. However, they will also increase the risks of exposure to asbestos, in particular for construction workers.

The actions put forward today are part of the prevention pillar of [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#), and will contribute to the objectives of the [European Green Deal](#), the [Zero-Pollution Action Plan](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

Working towards an asbestos-free future for all

To protect people from exposure to asbestos and prevent risks for future generations, the Commission sets out a comprehensive public health approach to:

- **Better support victims of asbestos-related diseases.**
 - The Commission will consult the tripartite [Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work](#) on including additional asbestos-related diseases as occupational diseases; and
 - The Commission has proposed [A new EU approach on cancer detection](#), which includes an update to the 2003 [Council Recommendation on cancer screening](#)
- **Better protect workers from asbestos.** The Commission will:
 - propose today a [revision of the Asbestos at Work Directive](#) to significantly lower the occupational exposure limit value to asbestos;
 - update guidelines to support Member States, employers and workers in implementing the revised Directive; and
 - launch an awareness-raising campaign on the safe removal of asbestos.
- **Improve information on asbestos in buildings.** The Commission will:
 - put forward a legislative proposal on the screening and registration of asbestos in buildings. Member States will be asked to develop national strategies for the removal of asbestos; and

- propose a regulatory approach to introduce digital building logbooks for better sharing and use of building-related data, from design to construction and demolition.
- **Ensure safe disposal of asbestos and zero pollution.** The Commission will:
 - revise the [EU Construction and Demolition Waste Management Protocol](#), and the [Guidelines for the waste audits](#) before demolition and renovation works of buildings; and
 - launch a study to identify asbestos waste management practices and new treatment technologies.

Significant EU funding is available to support Member States in health prevention, treatment, renovations and safe asbestos removal through the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), the [European Social Fund Plus](#) and the [European Regional Development Fund](#).

The EU will also continue to play a leading role in the global fight against asbestos, for instance in the context of the [Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention](#), the International Labour Organization, G7 and G20.

Protecting workers from exposure to asbestos

Workers are at greatest risk of being exposed to cancer-causing asbestos. To improve their protection, the Commission presents today a [proposal to amend the Asbestos at Work Directive](#). This includes a reduction in the exposure limit of asbestos at work to 10 times lower than the current value (from 0.1 fibres per cubic centimetre (f/cm³) to 0.01 f/cm³), based on the latest scientific and technological developments.

Together with awareness-raising and other improvements in health prevention and treatment, this proposal will bring us closer to our EU aim of beating cancer. It also creates a level playing field for businesses operating across the EU, while decreasing health care costs related to medical treatment.

Next steps

The Commission calls upon all EU institutions, Member States, social partners and other stakeholders to accelerate action to achieve an asbestos-free EU for current and future generations. The Commission's [proposal to amend the Asbestos at Work Directive](#) will be discussed by the European Parliament and Member States, with the Commission calling for a swift approval. Once adopted, Member States will have two years to transpose the Directive into national law.

Members of the College said:

Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas **Schmit**, said: *"Last year we made a commitment before the European Parliament to address the important calls to action in its report on protecting workers from asbestos. One year later, the Commission is presenting a series of measures that will not only offer better protection to workers, but will take a huge step towards an asbestos-free Europe. 78% of occupational cancers recognised in the Member States are related to asbestos. The amending Directive we propose today will drastically reduce exposure levels for workers, and provide training and guidance to employers."*

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella **Kyriakides**, said: *"Prevention is more effective than any treatment against cancer. With 40% of cancers being preventable, it is the most efficient long-term strategy. As part of the actions under Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, we aim to significantly contribute to cancer prevention by reducing the exposure to hazardous substances – asbestos is one of them. Today's proposals are another important deliverable of our Cancer Plan and another step in our work to build a strong European Health Union."*

Background

The actions presented in today's [Communication](#) follow up to the [European Parliament's resolution of 20 October 2021](#) on protecting workers from asbestos. This is in line with the commitment of President **von der Leyen** in her [Political Guidelines](#) to respond to resolutions under Article 225 TFEU appropriately, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law making principles.

Effectively reducing exposure to carcinogenic substances such as asbestos is part of the Commission's [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#) and [Zero-Pollution Action Plan](#). In its [2022 Work Programme](#) and in the [EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027](#), the Commission announced a proposal to lower the existing occupational exposure limit to asbestos. EU citizens also highlighted the importance of a revision of the Asbestos at Work Directive in the framework of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#). [Today's proposal](#) is the result of an extensive consultation process, taking into account a two-stage consultation of social partners, as well as close collaboration with scientists, representatives of workers, employers, and Member States.

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. It is estimated that 4.1 to 7.3 million workers are currently exposed to asbestos, with 97% working in construction and 2% in waste management. To eliminate the risks stemming from asbestos, EU has taken action over the past 40 years to limit and then ban all use of asbestos in 2005.

Nevertheless, given that over 220 million building units were built before the ban, it is likely that many still contain asbestos and pose a health threat. It is also still necessary to manage and dispose asbestos waste. The [Renovation Wave Strategy](#), aiming to at least double the annual rate of building renovations by 2030, further underlines the importance of a comprehensive approach to tackling the asbestos. The [proposal for a revised Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#), presented in December 2021, also underlines that Member States should support energy performance upgrades of existing buildings to contribute to achieving a healthy indoor environment, including through the removal of hazardous substances like asbestos.

For More Information

[Questions and answers: towards an asbestos free future](#)

[Factsheet: protecting people from asbestos](#)

[Communication on working towards an asbestos-free future](#)

[Proposal for amending the Asbestos at Work Directive](#)

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