

Occupational exposure to asbestos, Member States urged to reject European Parliament's requests to lower limit values

Brussels, 06/06/2023 (Agence Europe)

On Wednesday, 7 June, EU Member States are going to study the second negotiation meeting with the European Parliament on the revision of the directive on occupational exposure to asbestos.

During this meeting, the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU is expected to ask delegations to confirm, through a new mandate, that they are refusing to give in to the European Parliament's main arguments, namely those on lowering the exposure limit value to 0.001 fibres/cm³ after a period of 4 years (compared to 0.01 fibres/cm³ in the European Commission's proposal) and on reducing the transition period for using the electron microscopy method, even though a certain degree of flexibility could be shown over the last month.

In fact, the Swedish Presidency submitted a new draft mandate to Member States with this in mind on 2 June. It notably proposes that the delegations reject the European Parliament's amendments concerning the occupational exposure limit value and continue to insist on a "*reasonable and technically feasible*" occupational exposure limit value. It also asks them to stress the importance of having sufficient time to make the transition to electron microscopy, while demonstrating a certain degree of flexibility with respect to the length of the transition period.

The [Swedish] Presidency also proposes rejecting the European Parliament's amendments on passive exposure to asbestos, asbestos screening, and worker protection.

Several amendments can, however, be supported, such as those concerning the specific situation of firefighters.

According to one source, it could be difficult, in this context, to reach an agreement as early as next week, since the EU Council is considered to have taken a stubborn position and it would be difficult for the European Parliament to abandon its position on the limit value without major concessions in exchange.

Nevertheless, the Swedish Presidency would like to achieve a successful result on this issue.

Concerns in the construction sector

On 5 June, the *European Construction Industry Federation* (FIEC) and the *European Builders Confederation* (EBC) called on co-legislators to maintain a "*pragmatic*" approach on this issue.

On the eve of the second negotiation meeting, they are calling for agreement to be reached on a "*realistic and implementable framework for construction companies*".

"*Focusing on an extremely low occupational exposure limit value (OELV) [...] is no 'silver bullet' for an adequate protection of workers*", they write in a press release. "*If companies are not able to apply limit values or other new specific requirements, they will not be able to meet the intent of workers' protection*".

In addition, FIEC and EBC believe that a three- or four-year transition period is, moreover, insufficient. The seven-year transition period proposed by the EU Council is more appropriate.

(Original version in French by Solenn Paulic)