

# A FOCUS FOR TRADE UNION ACTION DURING THE DUTCH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU JANUARY 2016 - JUNE 2016

Trade unions throughout Europe support the initiative of the Dutch Presidency to update the EU Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive. We need to act now to ensure that the discussions lead to the type of changes that will protect workers from work related cancer in all industries, occupations and countries in Europe.



## WHY WE NEED TO FOCUS ON WORK-RELATED CANCER

Occupational cancer is the biggest work related cause of death in the EU. Occupational carcinogens pose a threat to 1 in 5 workers. To put this in perspective, for every one worker who dies from a work injury, about 20 workers are dying from a work related cancer.

This means that about 100.000 workers or retired workers in the EU are dying every year from a work related cancer.

Hazardous substances continue to be found in the workplace and pose a risk for future disease, although many occupationally related cancers result from exposures to hazardous agents decades ago.

Some substances such as silica and diesel engine exhaust are process-generated. While other work related cancer risks arise from the way that work is organised for example night work. Also, new substances like synthetic nano-particles are introduced in many production processes.

The burden of work related cancers is also a threat for the coming generations for example children of workers exposed to certain substances like endocrine disruptors are at higher risk of cancer.

All exposures are preventable.

## THE TRADE UNION TARGET IS TO ELIMINATE OCCUPATIONAL CANCER

Trade unions in Europe have as our target to eliminate occupational cancer. Trade union safety reps and health and safety committees play a crucial role.

At workplaces trade unions are demanding that dangerous substances and processes are eliminated or substituted with less dangerous ones. Likewise we are seeking to improve work organization in order to avoid or minimize exposures to night and shift work.

**To reinforce this work we are calling for improvements to the legislative framework at EU Level and we are seizing the opportunity created by the initiative of the Dutch Presidency.**

EU legislation is a key instrument because it establishes common minimum requirements for all 28 EU countries. It creates a common playing field avoiding competition between employers of the different EU countries at the cost of workers lives.

# WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

## TOWARDS BETTER REGULATION FOR WORKERS

The ETUC has six demands in the field of safety, health and welfare at work, for the upcoming Dutch Presidency of the European Union

1. At EU level, the legislation protecting workers against work related cancers needs to be revised as a matter of urgency. The basic legal provisions were adopted in 1990 in the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive. At that time, it was certainly a positive step forward. However that Directive contains binding occupational exposure limit values (BOELVs) for only three substances. 25 years later there are many gaps. In the real life, workers are exposed to hundreds of different substances. Millions of workers in Europe are exposed to dangerous cocktails of three or more different substances. Binding limit values are one of the essential tools for minimizing the exposure levels. The ETUC has identified a list of 50+ priority substances for which a limit value has to be included in the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive. We are calling for the Dutch Presidency to ensure that their work programme will update the Directive to include the 50+ priority substances.
2. Workers who have been exposed to carcinogens should be entitled to medical surveillance. It helps to detect as soon as possible a cancer and it may save lives to have rapid treatment at the very beginning of the disease. Presently EU legislation entitles workers to health surveillance only for the time during which they are exposed. This is insufficient. A cancer may occur dozens of years after the exposure stopped. The ETUC is calling for the Dutch Presidency to ensure that the Directive is updated to provide that workers who have been exposed to carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances or processes should be entitled to a regular health surveillance after, as well as during, their employment period.
3. Endocrine disruptors are also a cause of cancers (in particular breast cancers or prostate cancers). The EU commission has a duty under EU Legislation to provide a definition of endocrine disruptors before the end of 2013 in order to allow a correct implementation of several pieces of legislation relative to pesticides and biocides. Under pressure from employers and manufacturers, the EU Commission did not fulfill its obligation. We want the Commission to adopt before the end of 2016 the definition of endocrine disruptors on the basis of scientific evidence.
4. Some other pieces of legislation have to be adopted or improved in order to win the battle against work related cancers. Sun radiation has to be included in the scope of application of the directive on artificial optical radiations because it would prevent many skin cancers among workers in sectors like construction or agriculture. The long term effects of electronic fields should be considered in the specific legislation on that issue. The rules should also limit night work which is a cause of breast cancer. We are calling on the Dutch Presidency to set out a road map of how these essential missing elements will be dealt with.
5. Tens of millions of tonnes of asbestos, the biggest cause of workplace cancer, is still in place in workplaces across Europe, (although there is a ban on the importation or use of asbestos) there is no plan to eradicate that which is in place. As a result millions of workers are still being exposed to asbestos every year. We are calling on the Commission to ensure that Member States have in place a national plan for the safe removal and disposal of all asbestos in Europe.
6. Social Dialogue between employers and unions is one of the most important ways of ensuring the protection of workers and should be encouraged by governments and the European Commission. The union representing hairdressers in Europe have concluded an agreement with the representative group of employers for a better health and safety framework in their occupation. This agreement would contribute to avoiding cancers among hairdressers. Both sides of industry want the EU to implement it through a binding directive and we are calling on the EU Commission to stop stalling and take the steps to make the Hairdressers Agreement a binding Directive.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

At national level, affiliates and trade unions are asked to

Contact their Ministry of Employment in order to get their governments support for the updating of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive and to urge support for a stronger enforcement of existing legislation. To be effective this contact needs to be made in January 2016.

Contact the Embassy and Consulates of the Netherlands in your country and arrange to meet and outline the trade union demands.

Contact your MEPs in order to get their support too and importantly make them aware that our lives are more precious than lobbies' interests.

Keep the ETUC Health and Safety Committee informed about your actions and what feedback you are getting.

Include articles on work related cancer and how unions are campaigning for improvements in union newsletters and magazines.

Use digital media to inform your networks and raise awareness about this ETUC action for improvement to the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive using #zerocancer.

Meanwhile ensure that you continue to raise the issue with employers to ensure that they take practical levels to remove all carcinogens from the workplace or, where that is not possible, prevent any exposure. Every work related cancer is avoidable. Trade Union action may make the difference. We know from research that workplaces are safer when they have trade union led health and safety committees.

You can find out more information about the issues at stake and the type of jobs that have a high risk of occupational cancer at ETUC Health and Safety Committee  
ETUI guide <http://www.etui.org/Publications2/Guides/Preventing-work-cancers.-A-workplace-health-priority>  
Takala report <http://www.etui.org/en/Publications2/Working-Papers/Eliminating-occupational-cancer-in-Europe-and-globally>  
Risctox <http://www.etui.org/en/Topics/Health-Safety/Chemicals-and-REACH/RISCTOX-database>  
TU list of priority substances <http://www.etui.org/Publications2/Guides/Trade-Union-Priority-List-for-REACH-Authorisation>