



European institutions protect workers from asbestos! Now it is time for national governments and companies to follow suit!

Today, the European Parliament adopted the new directive on Asbestos. This is a great victory for construction workers, for national construction trade unions and for the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), as the directive will greatly improve the protection of workers from asbestos exposure. We now call on national governments to rapidly transpose the directive into national law and we urge companies – big and small – to quickly prepare for and adopt the lower limits for occupational asbestos exposure.

The occupational exposure limit (OEL) for asbestos across the European Union (EU) is to be set at 2,000 fibres/m³ (10,000 fibres if small fibres are included). Member States get two years to lower the exposure limit to 10,000 fibres/m³ and six years to reach the 2,000 fibres/m³ target.

In addition, the measurement methods to count asbestos fibres will change. Member states get six years to phase in an electron microscopy method which is a more accurate and modern system. Other improvements concern training, registration, better workplace prevention and recognition as occupational disease.

With an estimated 78 % of occupational cancers recognised in the Member States linked to exposure to asbestos fibres, it is a major cause of occupational cancer. Although asbestos has been banned, there are still 35 million buildings containing this life-threatening substance – buildings that will be renovated or demolished by workers in the context of the European Green Deal.

EFBWW general secretary, Tom Deleu: “This is a great victory for workers and an important step to stop the threat of the asbestos pandemic that loomed on the horizon with the Renovation Wave and the European Green Deal”. “However, it is time to move from words to action. National governments and companies should not wait for the last-minute call to implement the lower exposure limits. It is time to protect workers’ health and lives. Trade union eyes across the EU will be on the adoption of the new rules, and we will not hesitate to take action to push for its implementation.”

This outcome is the result of hard work by the EFBWW and its affiliates, and of the commitment of several members of European Parliament across political groups.

Contact:

Paula Cravina de Sousa, EFBWW Press and Communication officer, +32 (0) 473 13 43 49

The European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) is the European Workers’ Industry Federation for the following sectors: building, woodworking, forestry and allied industries and trades. The EFBWW has 77 affiliated unions in 36 countries and represents a total of 1,500,000 members.