



EUROPEAN COMMISSION CALL FOR EVIDENCE - Asbestos screening, registering and monitoring

Draft Response by the European Cancer Organisation

The European Cancer Organisation (ECO) welcomes prospective legal commitment by the EU to eliminating asbestos exposure. This would be greatly aided by the suggested introduction of a legislative proposal which, among other items, could set guidelines in respect to screening and registration of asbestos in buildings. This could mark a critical contribution towards building an asbestos-free built environment in the long term, removing the threats of asbestos, including its causation of cancer. Furthermore, it would create stronger accountability for, and political energy towards, asbestos elimination. In this respect, we also greatly welcomed the European Parliament resolution of 20 October 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on protecting workers from asbestos (2019/2182(INL) and recommend it as a reference point to the Commission.

Asbestos is a highly dangerous carcinogenic agent and is a major contributor to occupational cancer and work-related death. According to the quoted Impact Assessment, 78 % of occupational cancers across EU Member States are asbestos-related (especially mesothelioma and lung-cancer)¹. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has recognised asbestos as a proven carcinogen (group 1) that is responsible for asbestosis, lung cancers and mesothelioma, as well as larynx and ovarian cancers². As an example, a prospective cohort study in the Netherlands estimated that 12% of cases of lung cancer in men were attributable to lifetime occupational asbestos exposure, after adjustment for smoking and diet. All varieties of asbestos are carcinogenic and there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos.

In considering the preparation of a legislative proposal on asbestos, the European Cancer Organisation makes the following recommendations to the European Commission:

- That EU member states, via the forthcoming legislative proposal, make shared legal commitment to a joint objective of removing all asbestos in Europe.

¹ Impact assessment (SWD(2022) 3 11, SWD(2022) 3 12 (summary)) and a subsidiarity grid (SWD(2022)310) accompanying a Commission proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2009/148/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work, COM(2022)489

² <https://publications.iarc.fr/Book-And-Report-Series/Iarc-Monographs-On-The-Identification-Of-Carcinogenic-Hazards-To-Humans/Arsenic-Metals-Fibres-And-Dusts-2012>



- That progress towards this be regularly monitored and reported on, with the process for this to take place outlined within the legislative proposal.
- Include in legislative proposals, as part of an EU asbestos elimination plan, the mandatory screening of asbestos in buildings and the creation and maintenance of national asbestos registries.
- Allied to this, require Member States to develop and publish their national strategies for asbestos elimination.
- In support of this, create clear European-level guidelines for countries: on how to best conduct screening; in support of the creation of interoperable registries; and, recommended aspects for inclusion in national strategies;

This would be supported by the creation of further systems for sharing of best practices between countries on asbestos screening procedures (e.g. a national agency forum, similar as to those for national medicines agencies and health technology assessment agencies). Such a forum could also be utilised for disseminating and responding to latest scientific and practice evidence.

- Outline the EU's, and Member States', long-term strategy in support of research in the area of asbestos control and elimination.
- Commit the EU and its Member States' to support the achievement of a global ban on asbestos.

Finally, we take the opportunity of this consultation to signal to the European Commission and the wide political community, the attention and support that we recommend be provided to assist Ukraine in the coming years as it seeks to combat the asbestos exposure created by Russia's military attacks on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure. Regardless of competing and urgent recovery needs, strategic planning around asbestos hazard management must begin today to ensure a better, safer recovery for Ukraine and its people³.

³ <https://www.preventionweb.net/blog/rebuilding-ukraine-imminent-risks-asbestos>