



## EUROLAB Special Briefing

28th April - World Day for Safety and Health at Work

*“Safety and health in the use of chemicals at work” is the theme for the 2014 World Day for Safety and Health at Work. Marking the day, an ILO report shows that while chemicals can be useful, necessary steps should be taken to prevent and control potential risks for workers, workplaces, communities and the environment.*

*The report calls on governments, employers, workers and their organizations to collaborate in the development and implementation of national policies and strategies aimed at the sound management of chemicals at work. These must comprehensively and simultaneously address the health, safety, and environmental aspects related to the production and use of chemicals. The idea is to maintain the benefits achieved through the production and use of chemicals while minimizing workers' exposure as well as the emission of chemicals into the environment through national and international action.*

Chemicals are essential for modern life, but can be a danger to workers. Some of these dangers are well known, others less so. Ideally, the exposure of workers to dangerous substances should be eliminated, but often chemicals have to be managed in the workplace, just like any workplace hazard, to reduce the risk to workers.

**A chemical is defined by ILO Convention no. 170 (1990) on safety in the use of chemicals at work as "chemical elements and compounds, and their mixtures, whether natural or synthetic such as those obtained through production process".** Hazardous chemicals are classified according to the type and degree of their intrinsic health and physical hazards.

Use of chemicals at work is defined by the same Convention as any work activity which may expose a worker to a chemical, including during the production, handling, storage, transport, and disposal of chemicals.

The impact of chemical exposures on workers' health is enormous. While the calculation of the numbers harmed by chemicals is difficult (for example because of latency periods between exposure to the chemical and developing ill-health), it is **estimated that in 2004 there were 4 900 000 deaths attributable to environmental exposure and management of selected chemicals.** This figure includes both occupational and non-occupational exposures such as indoor smoke from solid fuel use.

## Legal framework for the prevention of harm to workers from chemicals of the European Union

The **Framework Directive on Safety and Health at Work (Directive 89/391 EEC)** adopted in 1989 guarantees **minimum safety** and health requirements throughout Europe. The Directive sets out the basic legal requirements on employers and workers, and establishes a hierarchy of prevention measures.

**Directive 98/24/EC of 7 April 1998 on the protection of the health and safety of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work** aims to lay down minimum requirements for the protection of workers from risks to their **safety and health arising**, or likely to arise, from the effects of chemical agents that are present at the workplace or as a result of any work activity involving chemical agents. This directive focuses the basic structure of the framework and makes specific provision for addressing the risks from chemical substances.

At the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), there is a large collection of information on the dangers of chemicals and the prevention of harm to workers. Some of the work focuses on cutting edge topics such as nanotechnologies, other materials consider how specific groups and sectors may be affected.

**Source of information:** EU OSHA Work and International Labour Organization

**For further information click on the following link:**

[https://osha.europa.eu/en/about/director\\_corner/blog/world-day-2014-safety-and-health-in-the-use-of-chemicals-at-work](https://osha.europa.eu/en/about/director_corner/blog/world-day-2014-safety-and-health-in-the-use-of-chemicals-at-work)



### **New EU-OSHA campaign “Healthy workplaces manage stress”**

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) launched on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014 a new **campaign 2014-2015 “Healthy workplaces manage stress”**. The campaign is raising awareness of stress and psychosocial risks in the workplace and encouraging employers, managers and workers and their representatives to work together to manage those risks.

#### **The main focuses of the campaign are:**

- To raise awareness of the growing problem of work-related stress and psychosocial risks.
- To provide and promote the use of simple, practical tools and guidance for managing psychosocial risks and stress in the workplace.
- To highlight the positive effects of managing psychosocial risks and stress in the workplace, including the business case.

For more information follow: <https://www.healthy-workplaces.eu/en/campaign-material/introducing-the-campaign-guide>