

EU launches campaign to help prevent asbestos exposure

Brussels 01-09-2006. The European Commission is launching a publicity campaign in all 25 Member States to raise awareness of the dangers of asbestos exposure. The campaign, which is set to begin September 1, will be accompanied by information and training activities and a practical guide to best practices.

"Asbestos is deadly serious – prevent exposure". This is the motto of the European Asbestos Campaign 2006, which is being organised in collaboration with the European Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC) – the co-ordinating committee of Member States Labour Inspectorates. And the figures bear this warning out: Thousands of people still die each year from the consequences of asbestos exposure, even 20 or 30 years after this exposure took place.

To try and prevent asbestos-related hazards, the EU has for some years been following a clear and distinct policy comprising preventive legislation, activities of information and awareness raising, co-operation with all stakeholders, a co-ordinated implementation and enforcement policy with subsequent monitoring. A general ban of the production and marketing of asbestos or asbestos-containing products has been in effect since 2005. And the handling of asbestos in any form has been prohibited since April 2006; only demolition, maintenance, and removal work are allowed under the strictly regulated conditions. But despite this, the practical problem of preventing exposure to asbestos in the course of removal, demolition, servicing and maintenance activities remains. And with the increase in globalisation and increasingly close economic ties, the EU has to take extra care not to counteract its efforts by re-importing asbestos-containing materials.

The campaign, which is primarily targeted at employers, employees and labour inspectors, will feature conferences and awareness-raising events aimed at informing people of the risks of exposure to asbestos and helping them develop preventive measures. It will be accompanied by additional information and training activities, which are being organised in association with the European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health at Work (OSHA). The agency will also have a special website, where you can find more information and special links to national websites on health and safety related to the risks of asbestos exposure: (<http://osha.eu.int/OSHA>). In addition, a "Practical Guide on Best Practice to Minimise Asbestos-Risks" in work that involves (or may involve) asbestos will be available.