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The European Parliament wants to protect workers from diesel exhausts

On 27 March the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted its position on the second stage of the revision of the Directive on the prevention of work-related cancers. The Commission's initial proposal has been amended in a number of sections with a view to strengthening the fight against occupational cancers. The most important amendments relate to diesel exhausts, to which some 3 million European workers are exposed.

The European Parliament (EP) has voted to include diesel exhausts in the scope of the Directive. It stated that it was in favour of an occupational exposure limit value of 50µg/m³ calculated on the basis of elemental carbon (one of the components of diesel engine emissions), which is identical to the limit value recently adopted in Germany. As most European countries do not have a limit value for exposure to diesel exhausts in the workplace, the adoption of such a limit at European level would represent significant progress.

The MEPs overwhelmingly supported these amendments: 41 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 7 abstentions. The amendments were based on a report presented by Belgian MEP Claude Rolin (EPP Group).

Faced with pressure from the industrial sectors, the Commission had eventually decided not to include diesel engine emissions in the proposal for a directive, in spite of the fact that, according to its own estimates, this measure would prevent 230 000 deaths from lung cancer over 60 years. The impact is even more significant if the other non-cancer deaths caused by these emissions are taken into account: non-cancerous respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular mortality. Thanks to the EP vote on 27 March, the issue of diesel exhausts at work is back on the European agenda.

The next stage will be the negotiations between Parliament and the Council of Ministers, in which all 28 EU Member States are represented. For a directive to be adopted, these two institutions have to reach an agreement. The final text of the Directive will probably be adopted some time this year. A third revision phase, focusing on other substances, is due to be launched this year, too.

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