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ISOPA and ALIPA welcome Commission's proposal to introduce Binding Occupational Exposure Limits for diisocyanates based on Tripartite Consensus

Diisocyanates are the **building blocks of polyurethane**, a key material used in a wide range of applications such as **insulating foams** for buildings, appliances, and vehicles, **protective coatings and adhesives**. Polyurethanes would not exist without diisocyanates, as no other chemicals have been found to be able to replace their function in terms of durability and efficiency.

Summary

ISOPA and ALIPA welcome the European Commission's [proposal](#) to amend the Chemical Agents Directive (CAD) 98/24/EC to establish binding EU Occupational Exposure Limit (OEL) for diisocyanates. Today, EU Member States have different OEL levels for individual diisocyanates across the Union and some even have no limit value at all. Therefore, this proposal establishes a level playing field to ensure a high level of protection for workers across the EU so as to further reduce the number of occupational asthma cases.

We support the values and the stepwise approach proposed by the Commission as this reflects a consensus on an EU OEL for diisocyanates reached within its Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at work (ACSH) by its representatives from Member State governments, workers' organizations such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and employers. We are nevertheless seriously concerned about the lack of reference that diisocyanates are to be measured as NCO (paragraphs 12, 13 and Annex I), which we consider to be an error of omission. Regarding the stepwise approach, sufficient time is needed for downstream users to implement mitigation measures in order to reach the challenging target values, a transition for which the Commission foresees additional costs of EUR 13.5 billion.

Importantly, the proposal complements an existing REACH Restriction (Commission [Regulation \(EU\) 2020/1149](#)) on diisocyanates which sets a mandatory training requirement for workers handling these substances. This reflects the Commission's commitment under the [EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2021-2027](#) "to streamline the interface between OSH and REACH regulation to ensure workers' protection". The case of diisocyanates illustrates how these two legal frameworks complement each other to provide more effective worker protection. The proposed OEL for diisocyanates, in combination with the mandatory trainings established in the REACH Restriction, will ensure a framework which fully protects workers.

Background

Policy context: the Commission's proposed OEL mirrors the consensus established by government, employers and trade union representatives.

In November 2021, the ACSH, consisting of representatives of Member States, employers and workers, [adopted](#) its opinion on an OEL for diisocyanates. This proposed a stepwise transition to comply with a time-weighted average (8-hour TWA) of 10 µg NCO / m³ by 2025 and 6 µg NCO / m³ by 2029 and a short-term exposure limit for 15 min (STEL) of 20 µg NCO / m³ by 2025 and 12 µg NCO / m³ in 2029. The ACSH highlighted that the combination of the REACH Restriction and

OSH provisions is the most efficient approach for preventing peak exposure, which is the key event leading to asthma from exposure to diisocyanates.

Impact on industry: ISOPA and ALIPA welcome the Commission's stepwise transition, which is critical to ensure sufficient time for downstream users to implement mitigation measures and for Member State's competent authorities to set up an EU network of laboratories able to improve sampling and analytical methods.

As indicated in the Impact Assessment¹ accompanying the proposal, implementing the proposed binding OEL will require substantial investments and will significantly challenge several user sectors. The Commission's proposal confirms that additional costs of EUR 13.5 billion are required for industry to achieve the proposed level of 6 µg NCO/m³ TWA, and that the costs would grow exponentially below this number. ISOPA and ALIPA consider the proposed values, which represent a three-fold reduction of the current EU average OEL, as the lowest workable solution for the polyurethane value chain to strive towards achieving zero cases of diisocyanates-induced asthma.

The proposed stepwise transition period, also recognized by the ACSH, is critical to allow the development and implementation of mitigation measures and best practices, including sampling and analytical methods by the EU production and downstream sectors of polyurethane systems. This will be complemented by health surveillance of workers to detect any early onset of ill-health and subsequent management of the individual worker to prevent further risks due to exposure to diisocyanates.

Impact on the EU Green Deal: Several sectors and applications using diisocyanates play a significant role in achieving the EU's environmental objectives.

Diisocyanates are indispensable to produce polyurethane, a key material for a range of applications such as insulation in buildings and appliances, which contributes to the European Green Deal targets by reducing CO₂ emissions through energy efficiency by enabling light-weight solutions and high-performance insulation materials. The RPA/FoBiG Socio-Economic Report (2021)² commissioned by the Commission's DG Employment, underlines that several other sectors using polyurethanes play a significant role in achieving the EU's Green Deal and gives the example of electric vehicles manufacturers who are increasingly replacing heavier materials in cars with polyurethane to offset the weight of batteries. A further reduction of this value could eliminate a number of applications that are crucial to achieving the Green Deal objectives.

About us

ISOPA is the European trade association for producers of aromatic diisocyanates and polyols. ISOPA members include BASF, BorsodChem, Covestro, Dow, Huntsman and Shell Chemicals. **ALIPA** is the European Aliphatic Isocyanates Producers Association, created by the major European producers BASF, Covestro, Evonik and Vencorex.

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¹ Impact Assessment accompanying the Proposal, Table 7, pp. 29-30, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26642&langId=en>

² European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, La Vedrine, M., Garrett, S., Webb, S., et al., Study on collecting information on substances with the view to analyse health, socio-economic and environmental impacts in connection with possible amendments of Directive 98/24/EC (Chemical Agents) and Directive 2009/148/EC (Asbestos): Final report for diisocyanates, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/96672>