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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

European Health and Safety Week 21 - 27 October 2019: Healthy Workplaces Manage Dangerous Substances

The Health, Safety & Environment Department is promoting and supporting European Health & Safety Week 21-27 October. The theme is Healthy Workplaces Manage Dangerous Substances.

Workers are exposed to dangerous substances in many European workplaces. Such exposures are more common than most people realise and, in fact, may occur in almost all workplaces. This presents major safety and health concerns.

A [dangerous substance](#) is any solid, liquid or gas that has the potential to cause damage to the safety or health of workers. Exposure can occur through inhalation, skin penetration or ingestion.

Workplace exposures to dangerous substances are linked to acute and long-term health issues, including:

- respiratory diseases (e.g. asthma, rhinitis, asbestosis and silicosis)
- harm to inner organs, including the brain and the nervous system
- skin irritation and diseases
- occupational cancers (e.g. leukaemia, lung cancer, mesothelioma and cancer of the nasal cavity).

In addition, the presence of dangerous substances can put workers at risk of fire, explosion, acute poisoning and suffocation.

EU-OSHA's second [European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks \(ESENER-2\)](#) reveals that dangerous substances are most prevalent in certain sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing and construction.

However, workers in all sectors are potentially at risk of exposure to dangerous substances. In fact, overall, 38% of European enterprises report potentially dangerous chemical or biological substances in their workplaces. Therefore, it is vital that the risks are identified and managed.

An unacceptable number of workers are exposed to dangerous substances at work throughout Europe.

Dangerous substances cause a substantial proportion of [occupational diseases](#), which have a negative impact on workers' quality of life and ability to work, and in some cases can be fatal.

Despite this, there is a general lack of awareness of the nature and abundance of dangerous substances at work and the risks they pose, and there has been little or no progress in reducing workers' exposure in recent years. According to the [European Survey on Working Conditions](#), the proportion of workers that report being exposed to chemicals for at least a quarter of their working time has not changed since 2000, remaining at around 17%.

Workplace exposure to dangerous substances must be eliminated or at least effectively managed to ensure the safety and health of workers and the economic success of businesses and society in general.

For effective occupational safety and health management, everyone — employers, managers and workers — must be on board. This is particularly important when it comes to dangerous substances, as neglecting the risks will have serious direct consequences for worker health and business survival.

- **Employers** are legally obliged to carry out risk assessments to identify all potential hazards associated with dangerous substances. They must ensure that risks are managed based on a hierarchy of prevention measures.
- **Managers** should motivate workers to get involved. They should ensure that workers receive regular training and easy-to-use resources.
- **Workers** should understand the potential risks, be well informed of any preventive measures, feel comfortable voicing concerns and be encouraged to actively participate in finding solutions. Union safety representatives play a key role in the workplace.

Establishing a prevention culture is key. Through strong leadership and commitment to occupational safety and health and the involvement of union safety representatives, you can create a working environment that encourages everyone to take safety and health seriously and cooperate in identifying and tackling risks.

A **prevention culture** must be created to successfully prevent the ill health, injuries and deaths caused by dangerous substances in all workplaces across Europe.

CWU posters will be distributed to Branches. Attached to this LTB is a pdf of the poster.

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer