

NEPSi PLATFORM SIGNS A FIRST MULTI-SECTORAL EUROPEAN SOCIAL DIALOGUE AGREEMENT ON THE PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO RCS

Today, the members of the multi-sectoral Negotiation Platform on Silica (NePSi)¹ signed an autonomous *'Agreement on Workers Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and Products containing It'* in the presence of Vladimír Špidla, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Through the implementation of Good Practices, the Agreement aims at improving the protection of over 2 million workers employed in the EU by the signatory sectors from exposure to respirable crystalline silica and at enhancing compliance with EU and EU Member States' existing workers health & safety legislation.

The Agreement also provides recommendations and tools for dust exposure monitoring, health surveillance, training and research. The signatories strongly believe that the text will lead to a strong commitment of all the Parties, allowing continuous improvement to be reported to a bipartite Council established by them. Each level of implementation will be involved in this reporting exercise, from the local sites to the EU-25 sector associations.

At the closure of the negotiation and on behalf of the Employers' representatives, Dr. M. Wyart-Remy, Secretary General of IMA-Europe, expressed her satisfaction regarding the way the whole process positively evolved. Mrs Wyart insisted that this successful negotiation has paved the way for a promising future where workers health protection and exposure prevention will be at the centre of the signatory sectors' efforts.

Mr. P. Mazeau (EMCEF Deputy Secretary General) said: "Above all, this agreement is important for the improvement of employees' health: it is its primary objective. The agreement is also of interest thanks to the advanced dispositions foreseen for the follow-up of its implementation and therefore for the evaluation of its results.

Finally, this agreement has the merit of putting forward real content in the European social dialogue. This dialogue, which was autonomously conducted by the social partners, is directly addressed to employees and employers without any intermediaries. This is one of the characteristics of the European sectoral social dialogue that has the huge advantage of being a true reflection of the daily realities of employees in enterprises."

Mr. Bart Samyn (EMF Deputy Secretary General) said: "This Agreement is important to ensure good health surveillance for the workers involved in the concerned sectors and especially in the prevention of all possible risks involved with respirable silica dust, while at the same time also securing the future perspectives of our industry in Europe. It is now up to the social partners to make this Agreement work."

The Agreement will enter into force within six months, but will remain open for signature by Employers and Employees of sectors not yet involved and willing to join.

¹ On the Employees' side: EMF, EMCEF and on the Employers' side: APFE, BIBM, CAEF, CEEMET, CEMBUREAU, CERAME-UNIE, EMO, EURIMA, EUROMINES, EURO-ROC, ESGA, FEVE, GEPVP, IMA-Europe, UEPG.