

Resolution of the European Trade Union Confederation

**Resolution on a Euro-wide Ban on Asbestos\***

The ETUC confirms its resolution adopted in March 1997 requesting a ban on trade of asbestos and related products. It considers that the recent conclusions of the Scientific Committee of DG XXIV allows the Commission to take prompt action. The ETUC requests the Commission to present a proposal based on the technical progress adaptation procedure, by the end of this year at the latest.

The ETUC recognises that banning of asbestos ("marketing and use" according to directive 76/769) will not bring immediate results for a number of workers exposed professionally in the demolition and maintenance sectors. The ETUC gives its full support to the Council of Social Affairs' resolution for an extensive review of the current legislation for the protection of workers against asbestos and demand Commission to allocate the necessary financial and human resources.

This review should bring a reduction of the existing exposure limit values for all asbestos fibres at least to the lowest level already achieved in the Member States.

The ETUC demands that European legislation establishes regulations for professional skills for removal, demolition and maintenance and requirements for the handling and management of waste containing asbestos, these measures will also improve the quality of the environment.

Considering the increased number of mesothelioma-specific cancers related to exposure to asbestos, the ETUC demands that Member States keep a register of the incidence of mesotheliomas and cancers in each country in order to help to receive compensation for the victims and the Commission to make available the information and organise the exchange of information.

The ETUC asks the Commission to examine the possibilities to harmonise existing national rules dealing with the field of registration of asbestos in building, plants, infrastructure, transport equipment, household equipment etc. and concerning intervention on sites, in order to ensure proper and updated information to authorities, owners and contractors to protect the overall population and environment from the risk arising from asbestos.

The ETUC demands that the research programme of the EU give priority to the evaluation of all hazards arising from substances and preparation used as substitutes for asbestos and gives support for improving investigations on the toxicological testing of new materials. It also recommends the expansion of technological research programmes in order to develop new products and to improve the knowledge on non- or less harmful alternatives including new, thick (less respirable fibres) to the existing applications of the still existing asbestos products.

The ETUC requests the Commission to give support to the regions directly concerned by the socio-economic restructuring of the asbestos cement industries and to promote an exchange of know-how on technologies and substitutes towards these regions. It recalls also the importance of maintaining competition rules in this sector.

The ETUC calls up all EU governments and the Commission to give full support to France on the WTO dispute with Canada. It rejects WTO policy that would challenge European and international health and safety regulations and conventions.

Considering that most of the world production of asbestos is used within third world countries, the ETUC calls for an international ban on asbestos and condemns the export of asbestos waste to countries outside

the EU. The ETUC calls for international trade union action and for the ratification by all EU countries of ILO convention n°162.

\* This resolution was adopted by the ETUC executive Committee on 8 and 9 October 1998.