

EU-EU-wide Asbestos SLIC inspection campaign - final report – short summary

BACKGROUND

Under the slogan “Asbestos is deadly serious. Prevent exposure!” the EU Member states had carried out an inspection campaign from September to December 2006.

At its meetings in 2003 and 2004, the SLIC agreed to launch an inspection campaign in 2006 and to prepare a guide to good practice in cooperation with the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work ACSH.

The main challenges for labour inspectorates from asbestos arise in maintenance, removal and demolition work.

There are practical problems with:

- identifying asbestos (Is it asbestos or not? Which type of asbestos?);
- drawing up an inventory of asbestos-containing material (location, amount, state);
- accidental exposure in refurbishment and maintenance work;
- risk assessment and appropriateness of working methods;
- removal and disposal of asbestos cement material, especially from private buildings;
- waste disposal and OSH;
- licensing and certification of companies specialising in removal and disposal of asbestos;
- information for the general public and training of inspectors, employers and workers.

Due to historical and political differences affecting asbestos and its handling, the Member States' labour inspectorates adopted different approaches: in Member States where asbestos trading and handling had been banned for years, removal and waste disposal activities took priority; others concentrated on topics such as supervising licensed companies.

A guide in all official languages for workers, employers and labour inspectors

This *Practical Guide on Best Practice to Minimise Asbestos Risks' in work that involves (or may involve) asbestos* focused on:

- occurrence of asbestos exposure, relevant fields of activity and levels of risk;
- cases where asbestos may be present and identifying materials which contain asbestos;
- inventory of types of structures, installations and materials which may contain asbestos;
- risk of asbestos exposure in the course of demolition, maintenance and renovation work and waste disposal;
- risk assessment
- safety measures for workers engaged in asbestos disposal
- protective measures
- classification of risks according to exposure situations.

The best practice guide aimed to:

- help identify asbestos and asbestos products during use, maintenance and servicing of plant, equipment and buildings and raise awareness of their presence;
- describe good practice for removing asbestos (including dust suppression, enclosure and protective equipment) and handling asbestos-cement products and waste;
- encourage an approach to protective equipment and clothing that takes account of human factors and individual variability.

Some countries published the guide as a booklet (e.g. PT, CZ, ES, SI) for experts and firms doing asbestos work; others distributed it to all inspectors

Training for labour inspectors

Training was offered in nearly all Member States for asbestos specialist inspectors; in some countries all OHS inspectors were involved in the campaign and subsequently trained.

Social partner involvement

Another important feature of this campaign was its tripartite approach. Social partner were involved at EU level in the preparation of the campaign and national labour inspectorates were asked to actively involve social partners in training and information schemes in their countries.

RESULTS

Asbestos still high on the agenda

In all Member States the health hazard of (legal) handling of asbestos-containing material is still on the agenda; it needs continuous action by labour inspectorates to keep OSH standards high and to keep risk levels as low as achievable.

Non-compliance with asbestos-related OSH-legislation and regulations was found in on-site management as expected (risk assessment, training of workers, identification of asbestos,

measurements, appropriate equipment), and especially at interfaces in the delivery or production line and in uncommon situations when disposing waste e.g. when rejecting incorrectly packed containers and re-packing. It was concluded that inspection strategies needed to focus more on the organisational aspects to achieve sustainable effects, and further information and training of employers and site managers, and of workers, was needed.

A trend to SMEs with lesser capacity

A trend could be observed towards smaller-scale work with asbestos containing material, now often done by small and micro businesses. This down-scaling has led to a decline in employers' and employees' awareness, knowledge and experience of the risks and necessary OSH measures. This is clear from the high degree of non-compliance on key factors for asbestos risk management such as risk assessment, information and training of workers, preparation of work plans and proof of competence.

Less known sources of exposure

During the campaign railway trains, recycling of (roof) tiles and transport containers were revealed to be sources of asbestos exposure and specific good practice guidance would be useful.

Differences linked to legislation

The regulations on notification of asbestos-related works and certification of competence of companies and/or workers differ widely between Member States. The report concludes that absence of regulation in this field seems to be a major factor leading to low competence on sites, and hampers adequate monitoring by labour inspectorates.

Labour inspectorates need support and training

Prevention of asbestos-related health hazards can't be managed by labour inspectorates alone. It requires commitment by all players in this field. Information and training of inspectors, social partners and experts would help to build commitment. Evaluations also reveal a great need for training and information of all parties involved in asbestos-related work, including inspectorates

A need for Europe-wide guidance

The new Guide was widely used as information material. There was broad acceptance by national and international experts, as it displayed a common European standard of good practice. It will also be used in other EU-funded programmes and projects. The report concludes that the guide should be further developed to reflect state-of-the-art techniques and updated regularly, and that the campaign results highlight the need to concentrate on common EU practical guidelines as a minimum standard and starting point for all involved.

New forms of communication and training recommended

In many countries asbestos work is related to 'sporadic exposure at low intensity' and the workers at risk are mainly working in maintenance. More information and easy-to-understand (graphic, pictorial) information would be useful. Similarly, the subject of accidental exposure should be better covered: how to avoid it, and what to do in the case of.

One side-effect of the campaign was that first steps were taken towards internet-based exchange of experience. An asbestos forum for labour inspectors was proposed.

National asbestos management system

In the framework of the SLIC Asbestos Campaign 2006 the survey on National Asbestos Management Systems was updated. The aim of this exercise was to collect information from Member States on how the Health and Safety Inspectorates manage the system for selecting and authorising companies to remove asbestos in buildings, industrial plants and waste processes, and how they provide access to this information, which is of common interest. Overview tables are available in the report.

A Member States Report was produced to evaluate the results of the campaign and the acceptance and implementation of the Asbestos Directive.

In some countries such as the UK, Sweden and Denmark the SLIC campaign was a starting point for specific and long-running asbestos programmes, or it helped to get the asbestos problem on the public agenda again (e.g. Austria, Germany).

The report will also be made available by the European Commission in French and in German.