

Kari Mäkelä, TEAM Industrial Union: Downstream users of chemicals could be unaware of their duties

Kari Mäkelä from the Finnish TEAM Industrial Union has clear goals for the joint information campaign with ETUC and EMCEF. “We should use every possible route to inform companies. Every worker should know that something is happening in the field of chemicals, and every occupational safety and health representative and shop steward should understand that it is also a trade union issue to ensure that companies follow the legislation,” he stresses.

Kari Mäkelä, Work Environment Officer at TEAM, says that the Finnish chemical industry has already been preparing for the new EU chemical legislation for a considerable time, but he fears that downstream user companies in particular might not realise that the regulations also compel them to act.



Kari Mäkelä says that the campaign provides a good opportunity to focus also on safe use of chemicals

“We have in the Finnish chemical sector very strong and active industrial federations. They have been training and informing their member companies for many years already. I believe that in the chemicals sector the situation is ok, and the same may be true in larger companies within the rubber and glass industry. But the smaller the downstream user company is, the more uncertain the situation could be,” estimates Mr Mäkelä.

“I think there are companies that do not know enough, so why not use our contacts and the trade union route as well? The challenge is the same for companies and trade unions.”

Mr Mäkelä points out that there might be downstream users who cannot be sure whether their suppliers will supply the chemical they need to them. “In Finland, we have small companies producing special products and they use one chemical for a very special purpose. It could be a very difficult situation if the substance supplier has not registered the substance for that purpose,” remarks Mr Mäkelä.

Long-term engagement

The Industrial Union TEAM envisages a longer campaign. Kari Mäkelä hopes that it will mobilise discussions within workplaces on the risk management of chemicals. “It still is an important issue in industry. During the periods of most change it is also easier to campaign on old problems. “

He adds that according to the statistics, diseases from industrial chemicals in particular have decreased in Finland. “This is very important. But the change itself is also very crucial. New data is gathered thanks to REACH and CLP and communicated to the company via the new Safety Data Sheet, and this provides much more information for the workplace risk assessment . The Safety Data Sheet provides information for employers. It is their

responsibility to plan, train, inform workers, and of course also to give the Safety Data Sheet to their employees.”

Companies need to check whether their risks are under control when new Safety Data Sheets are delivered to them. Mr Mäkelä also hopes that in the future, both consumers and staff in workplaces will take advantage of the information on substances on ECHA’s website.

Most people in the industry sector think, according to Mr Mäkelä, that the registration of chemicals is the most relevant risk assessment tool under REACH. ”But it is also important that REACH also results in increased pressure to substitute the most dangerous chemicals,” underlines Mr Mäkelä.

The union is organising training courses and seminars and is also publishing articles to inform companies about the new legislation.

Industry workers as members

The Industrial Union TEAM is one of the Finnish trade unions and is a multi-sector trade union. The medium-sized organisation has around 65 000 members and an office of around 65 staff members in Helsinki, from where TEAM is extending its activities across the whole country .TEAM is working together with a network of more than 600 shop stewards and 400 occupational health and safety representatives in companies. The members work in sectors such as the chemical industry, medical industry, rubber, glass and ceramics, printing, textile, garments, shoe and leather industries, the laundry sector and car tyre installers.