

EU trade unions remind companies about their obligations and deadlines under chemicals laws

The European Trade Union Confederation, ETUC, together with the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation EMCEF and national trade unions have launched a strong campaign to make companies aware of the duties and timelines of EU's new chemicals legislation. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) are supporting the campaign.

Dr Tony Musu, Senior Researcher at ETUC and Member of the ECHA Management Board, has an alarming concern: Do companies in Europe even know that they have obligations under the new EU chemicals legislation?

"I think that most companies do not even know about them, and the first deadlines are drawing nearer. Ignoring them can have serious consequences for companies," reminds Dr Musu.



Tony Musu wants all companies to be aware of the deadlines.

The EU Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) entered into force in 2007 and the Regulation on Classification, Labelling and Packaging of Substances and Mixtures - the so-called CLP Regulation – in 2009. Their objective is to ensure the safe use of chemicals, and they bring many new legal obligations to companies.

Dr Musu believes that small and medium-sized enterprises in particular remain unaware of their obligations. "Not all companies are members of industry associations, but most of them have trade union representation. We try to reach them with the help of the workers' representatives. Our message is: Please inform your employer that we now have the REACH and CLP Regulations and your company may consequently have some obligations under them," he says.

Production and health at risk

"We want the workers to know that if their company fails to comply, it might put the production company at risk," explains Dr Musu.

However, the campaign also intends to pass the message that REACH has positive benefits for health and safety in the workplace. The goal is to have better control of chemical risks.

"Chemicals cause a lot of diseases in the workplace. ETUC found out in 2004 on the basis of Eurostat data that one occupational disease in three in workplace is caused by chemicals. That is a huge number! The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao estimated in 2009 that every year 74 000 workers die in Europe because of the use of hazardous chemicals in the workplace. We have supported REACH right from the beginning and really believe that it will improve working environments" stresses Dr Musu.