

ERS Response to Consultation - Asbestos screening, registering and monitoring

The European Respiratory Society (ERS) welcomes the European Commission commitment to address the health and environmental risks related to exposure to asbestos.

If well implemented, the proposed legislation could represent a step forward towards an asbestos-free future.

Asbestos is a highly dangerous carcinogenic agent and is a major contributor to occupational cancer and work-related death. The contribution of occupational lung cancer has been shown to be considerably larger than for most other common cancers. The most frequently quoted estimate is 15% in men and 5% in women, although higher population-attributable risks have been reported (24% overall, 29% in men and 5% in women) for the contribution of occupational exposure. A prospective cohort study in the Netherlands estimated that about 12% of cases of lung cancer in men were attributable to lifetime occupational asbestos exposure, after adjustment for smoking and diet.¹

Asbestos is particularly found in insulation, pipe lagging and brake pads and only a few weeks of asbestos exposure may lead to malignant mesothelioma.

The total burden of lung cancer cases attributable to work-related exposure to respiratory carcinogens in Europe has been estimated to be 32 400 cases per year.²

All varieties of asbestos are carcinogenic and there is no safe level of exposure. Keeping this into consideration, the European Respiratory Society recommends to the European Commission to consider the following points for a long term vision in the path to completely eliminate exposition to asbestos in the future:

1. All EU Member States will need to share a common objective and commit to remove all kinds of asbestos. To achieve this result, there must be a mandatory national plan of building screening and removal of asbestos. Each country must also have elimination targets as well as being able to ensure the enforcement of the legislation.
2. Member States should develop and publish their national strategies for asbestos elimination and start sharing best practices to have a less fragmented and a more fit for purpose strategies to achieve the best possible outcome for European citizens. A long-term strategy in support of the research in the area of asbestos control and elimination should also be developed.
3. At European level, it would be important to gather all the information coming from the different Member States while creating a European-level guideline on how to best conduct building screening, in order to have a clear plan that can work across Europe.

¹ [Current and new challenges in occupational lung diseases | European Respiratory Society \(ersjournals.com\)](https://www.ersjournals.com)

² [Current and new challenges in occupational lung diseases | European Respiratory Society \(ersjournals.com\)](https://www.ersjournals.com)

4. Experts such as clinicians, scientists and healthcare providers should be involved in this process, in order to create the appropriate tools to inform the general population and policy makers about the consequences of asbestos exposure and help finding quick and efficient solutions.

Ultimately the EU should be committed to support the achievement of a ban on asbestos across Europe and across the world. We therefore urge the European Commission to also work towards a global ban on asbestos.