



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

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REACH: a decisive step, but inadequate in protecting workers' health

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) finds that the compromise position on REACH, agreed by the European Parliament and the Finnish Presidency of the Council, enables Europe to adopt a more socially responsible approach to managing chemical risks. However, the ETUC deplores the inadequacy of the text with regard to protecting the health of workers.

The ETUC welcomes the confirmation of the fundamental principle of shifting the burden of proof onto industry, but regrets that the compromise falls short in its ability to protect workers' health. In fact, some of the important steps forward that were demanded by the ETUC and up to now also supported by the Parliament have been lost following pressure from the chemical industry. Industry will be able to go on using certain extremely dangerous substances even if safer alternatives are available, which is inconsistent with the substitution principle defined in existing legislation on workers' protection.

Furthermore, the duty of care principle has been reduced to a declaration of intent. The final backwards step for workers concerns the chemical safety report, which will only be an obligation for substances produced in volumes of at least 10 tonnes per year. Workers who are exposed to the 20,000 substances produced in quantities of between 1 and 10 tonnes will therefore have no access to information that is crucial to their safety.

The REACH reform has been subjected to the most intense lobbying campaign ever mounted by industry within the European institutions.

In view of this, the ETUC emphasises that the future of European industry cannot be determined solely by the demands imposed by competitiveness. Confidentiality of data must not be allowed to have a negative impact on human health and environmental safety.



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