



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

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REACH must give workers better health protection

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) hosted a conference on Tuesday 19 September on how REACH ties in with European health and safety at work legislation. With scrutiny of the draft regulation coming up at the second reading, the ETUC reminded Parliament and Council that REACH must hang together with existing Community laws if it is to protect workers.

Under REACH, authorisations can be granted to use substances of very high concern like carcinogens. But the European Carcinogens Directive says employers must replace these substances by safer alternatives. Are we heading for a clash between these two sets of laws?

This kind of issue on how REACH links up with Community health and safety at work legislation loomed large in the discussions between the 160-plus attendees, who included representatives from the European Parliament, Council, Commission, industry and NGOs.

The ETUC argued that REACH must deliver real synergies with existing Community directives that are meant to protect workers who are exposed to chemicals.

The ETUC has consistently backed Parliament's approach on how the substitution principle fits into REACH. *"Authorisation for a substance of very high concern must always be refused where a safer alternative is available"*, argued John Monks, ETUC General Secretary, in his closing speech.

The ETUC also believes that, properly applied, the substitution principle will promote innovation and employment in the European chemical industry, and make it more internationally competitive.

Speaking to the officials of the European institutions, John Monks added: *"REACH must not take away from the Member States' ability to impose more stringent health and safety at work measures at the national level than those laid down at Community level. That would be an unacceptable step back for Europe's workers."*



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