

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001915/26
to the Commission
Emmanouil Fragkos (ECR)
(8 May 2026)**

Subject: European framework for protecting firefighters from cancer

The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified the occupational exposure of firefighters as Group 1 carcinogenic to humans.

According to scientific evidence and firefighters' associations, firefighters are systematically exposed to benzene, dioxins, PFAS, formaldehyde, heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and other toxic combustion products, often through long-term and cumulative exposure.

This exposure has been associated with an increased risk of leukaemia, Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin lymphomas, lung, kidney, bladder and mesothelioma cancers.

In addition, several Member States have already recognised specific types of cancer as occupational diseases of firefighters or are considering relevant legislative initiatives. European trade unions are also calling for a strengthening of the EU framework for the prevention of and protection against occupational cancers.

1. Does the Commission consider that current EU legislation on health and safety at work provides adequate protection for firefighters against cumulative exposure to carcinogens?
2. Will the Commission consider European guidelines on identifying occupational cancers in firefighters and monitoring their health long-term?
3. Will the Commission consider further restrictions on PFAS in fire-fighting foams and related equipment under the REACH Regulation?

Submitted: 8.5.2026

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Mînzatu on behalf of the European Commission
(6 July 2026)**

1. The EU occupational safety and health (OSH) directives set minimum requirements for the adequate health and safety protection of all workers, including firefighters. Substances of particular concern to firefighters, such as benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, formaldehyde, chromium VI and heavy metals, such as lead and mercury, are covered by the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive ⁽¹⁾. This directive requires employers to assess all risks ⁽²⁾ to which workers are or might be exposed, including those arising from cumulative exposure to carcinogens, and to put in place adequate preventive and protective measures.
2. While there are no specific guidelines for firefighters, in May 2025, the European Chemicals Agency was mandated to produce guidelines for the assessment of the exposure to a combination of chemicals that have similar health effects ⁽³⁾. These will be particularly relevant for firefighters that are often subject to such exposure. Within 24 months, an interim report on methodologies/tools to drive an assessment will be developed and in the following 24 months practical guidelines will be drafted.
3. The Commission has adopted a restriction banning the use of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in firefighting foams ⁽⁴⁾. The restriction will prevent around 470 tonnes of PFAS emissions every year and drastically reduce the exposure of firefighters to PFAS. Other uses of PFAS will be addressed in the context of the universal restriction proposal, which is currently being assessed by the European Chemicals Agency ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2004/37/oj>.

⁽²⁾ Article 3 paragraph 2.

⁽³⁾ On the basis of Article 2(2), point (b) of Directive (EU) 2024/869, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/869/oj>.

⁽⁴⁾ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/1988/oj>.

⁽⁵⁾ See: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) <https://www.echa.europa.eu/hot-topics/perfluoroalkyl-chemicals-pfas>.