

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002032/26
to the Commission
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(18 May 2026)

Subject: Need to recognise cancers as occupational diseases of firefighters in the European Union

According to the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer, occupational exposure as a firefighter is categorised as a Group 1 human carcinogen ⁽¹⁾, as the performance of duties entails long-term and cumulative exposure to carcinogenic combustion substances, smoke particles and toxic gases, PFAS, as well as other chemicals from protective equipment and firefighting foams ⁽²⁾.

Research shows that cancer is the primary cause of death related to the profession of firefighter ⁽³⁾, with firefighters subject to a 9% higher cancer risk and 14% higher death rate compared to the general population. Despite repeated calls by European and national trade unions for the institutional recognition of specific types of cancer as occupational diseases of firefighters and the need to establish a uniform framework for prevention, registration and protection, in many Member States, including Greece, the current institutional framework remains inadequate.

Can the Commission therefore answer the following:

1. Does it intend to update Recommendation (EU) 2022/2337 ⁽⁴⁾ on the European schedule of occupational diseases in order to strengthen prevention measures and the possibility of compensation for diseases linked to the occupational exposure of firefighters, as proposed by the European Parliament ⁽⁵⁾?
2. What initiatives does it intend to take to create a common European framework for the protection, registration, prevention and support of firefighters and emergency workers in light of the health risks they face in the performance of their duties?

Submitted: 18.5.2026

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

The recommendation on the European schedule of occupational diseases ⁽¹⁾ does not focus on specific occupations; it covers specific diseases caused by exposure to specific hazardous substances covering all workers in all sectors.

Substances of concern to firefighters, such as benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, formaldehyde, asbestos, chromium VI and heavy metals such as lead and mercury are covered by the recommendation pointing to specific diseases resulting from such exposure. It was recently updated with further asbestos-related diseases.

Under EU legislation ⁽²⁾, employers are required to assess all safety and health risks that their workers face as a result of their work, and to take the necessary preventive and protective measures.

Member States are required to ensure that workers receive health surveillance appropriate to the risks they incur at work, including the risks from exposure to carcinogens and other chemicals that firefighters could face because of their work.

¹ See <https://publications.iarc.who.int/615>. Based on international research, the IARC concludes that there is an increased incidence of prostate, testicular, kidney, bladder, lung and laryngeal cancer, as well as melanoma, mesothelioma, leukaemia and lymphoma, among firefighters compared with the general population.

² As a result, specific risk assessments, adequate protective measures, and targeted medical surveillance are necessary for these high-risk workers.

³ According to IAFF data, from 2002 to 2019, cancer was responsible for 66% of the deaths of firefighters during their professional careers.

⁴ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/2337 concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases (OJ L 309, 30.11.2022, p.12, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2022/2337/oj>).

⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2026-0100_EN.html

⁽¹⁾ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2025/2609 of 18 December 2025 concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases (C/2025/8593), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2025/2609/oj>.

⁽²⁾ Including in particular Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (OJ L 183, 29.6.1989, p. 1) (the 'Framework Directive'), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1989/391/2008-12-11>, Directive 2009/148/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work (OJ L 330, 16.12.2009, p. 28), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/148/2023-12-20>, Council Directive 98/24/EC of 7 April 1998 on the protection of the health and safety of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work (OJ L 131, 5.5.1998, p. 11), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1998/24/2024-04-08>, and Directive 2004/37/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens, mutagens or reprotoxic substances at work (OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 50), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2004/37/2024-04-08>.

Moreover, guidelines for managing asbestos-related health and safety risks at work ⁽³⁾ include a chapter addressed specifically at firefighters and other emergency services, whilst the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work provides information and tools ⁽⁴⁾, as well as a case study ⁽⁵⁾ on protecting the health of 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 ⁽⁶⁾, relevant also 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⁾ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6523ba3a-df3b-11f0-8439-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://osha.europa.eu/en> — see, for example, https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/emergency_services.pdf.

⁽⁵⁾ <https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Healthy-firefighters.pdf>.

⁽⁶⁾ On the basis of Article 2(2), point (b) of Directive (EU) 2024/869, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/869/oj>.