

Question for written answer P-012141/2013 to the Commission

Rule 117

Karima Delli (Verts/ALE)

Subject: EU response to health risks posed by mercury in dental amalgams

The Minamata Convention on Mercury was adopted in October 2013 and is due to be ratified shortly by the European Union. Under the Convention signatories are required to phase down the use of dental amalgams, which consist of 50 % mercury. However more is needed to provide long-term protection for dentists and dental assistants exposed to mercury vapours in their surgeries.

A publication in 2003 by the INRS, the French Occupational Safety Research Institute, stated that dental practitioners have a high level of exposure to mercury vapours, particularly when working on patients' fillings and when standing or sitting next to amalgam separators that are inadequately sealed. Many scientific articles have proven that mercury vapours are at the root of a variety of disorders, notably neurocognitive ones, in dentists and that they affect the fertility of women dentists and women dental assistants in particular. Therefore, for the good of these EU workers, can the Commission answer the following:

1. What is the Commission's position regarding this health risk? What measures is it considering to tackle them? Is the Commission considering banning mercury in dental amalgams? If not, why not?
2. Does the Commission believe the dental professions can be made to adopt practices that will protect them when working on old fillings? Is it planning to take measures to make them comply with these practices? If not, what alternative measures is it considering adopting?
3. Will the Commission launch the EU Strategy on Health and Safety at Work again for the period 2014-2020 in order, in particular, to take stock of chemical health hazards at work?

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Answer given by Mr Mimica on behalf of the Commission (25.11.2013)

As part of the implementation of the Community Strategy Concerning Mercury adopted in 2005, the Commission services consulted the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks – SCENIHR on the safety of dental amalgam for patients and users.

As far as dental personnel are concerned, the SCENIHR opinion of May 2008¹ concluded that the incidence of reported adverse effects is very low and decreased substantially, especially in connection with improvements to dental amalgam delivery.

On the basis of this opinion, the Commission has not proposed measures further restricting the use of mercury in dental amalgam. The Commission requested an update of the SCENIHR opinion² and will re-examine its position in case further evidence becomes available.

Regarding the protection of workers, the Scientific Committee for Occupational Exposure Limit Values adopted a Recommendation on *Elemental mercury and inorganic divalent mercury compounds (SCOEL/SUM/84)*³ in 2007. On this basis, the Commission adopted Directive 2009/161/EU⁴ establishing an Indicative Occupational Exposure Limit Value for this substance.

The Directive is part of the legislative framework on Occupational Health and Safety in the EU. As part of this framework, Directive 98/24/EC⁵ obliges the employer to take the measures to protect the health and safety of workers exposed to hazardous chemicals.

The Commission finalised the evaluation of the Occupational Health and Safety strategy for 2007-2012⁶ and launched a public consultation on a new policy EU framework. Once the analysis of the replies will be completed, the Commission will decide on further steps.

¹ Available on webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/health/archive/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/docs/scenihr_o_016.pdf

² Available on webpage: http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/emerging/docs/scenihr_q_034.pdf

³ Available on webpage: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3852&langId=en>

⁴ Available on webpage: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:338:0087:0089:EN:PDF>

⁵ Available on webpage: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1998:131:0011:0023:EN:PDF>

⁶ SWD(2013)202 of 31.5.2013.