



**INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON
THE PROTECTION OF HOSPITAL WORKERS FROM
THE OCCUPATIONAL RISKS RELATED TO CARCINOGENS
3 September 2021**

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Welcome speech

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the seminar on the protection of hospital workers from the occupational risks related to carcinogens organised under the auspices of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and which represents one of the efforts of the Roadmap on Carcinogens to reduce the exposure to carcinogens in the workplace.

Initially, I would like to say that I was truly shocked by the estimates of the International Labour Organisation and the Dutch National Institute of Public Health and the Environment, according to which more than 120,000 people develop cancer in the European Union annually due to occupational exposure and more than 100,000 people die annually from work-related cancers. The estimates are alarming.

Allow me to borrow the words of journalist Kevin Myers who said that, "In the military combat of World War I, two million people died every year, and we all agree that that was a horrible slaughter. But in reality, this is happening every year around the world, whereby the same number of workers die only because they go to work."

I am thus even more pleased that you have joined us today in such large numbers to listen to the researchers and experts from Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain and Slovenia, and also the representatives of the European social partners.

At this point, I would like to thank all the speakers who were prepared to share with us their research findings, experience and views.



If we want to prevent work-related cancers and subsequent suffering and deaths, we must work harmoniously at all levels. Everyone interested in this topic, i.e. researchers, occupational health and safety experts, social partners, health-care workers, politicians and others, has gathered today in this virtual space. I regret that we were unable to organise the seminar in person as this would have undoubtedly contributed to a livelier exchange of opinions and views. I nevertheless invite you to use this day for consideration on how to further improve our cooperation when seeking solutions for the utmost effective prevention of exposure of hospital workers to carcinogens.

I wish for as many of us as possible to support the efforts of the Roadmap on Carcinogens to reduce the exposure to carcinogens in the workplace and its objective to raise awareness and exchange good practices for risk management due to occupational exposure to carcinogens. In their initial agreement concluded during the 2016 Dutch EU Presidency, the founding partners of the Roadmap stated that we needed to be more ambitious when tackling this problem. Ambition, courage and perseverance are always needed to bring about change that leads to progress.

In addition to a firm legal framework and a set of carcinogens exposure limit values, the raising of awareness and provision of support to companies and organisations are also vital. We must be aware that a mere adoption of binding limit values does not suffice for the suitable protection of workers.

European trade unions and employer associations, the European Commission, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the European Chemicals Agency and the founding member states – the Netherlands, Austria and Finland, which were later joined by Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia – are aware of these problems. As a result, we drafted a new strategy of the Roadmap on Carcinogens to abolish the use of carcinogens in the workplace, which was presented in autumn 2020 during the German EU Presidency. The strategy is based on twelve projects to be carried out by 2024 in order to finally attain a significant reduction in deaths due to work-related cancers.

At the EU level and within the Roadmap, we are striving to highlight the actual risks by means of better and more detailed data regarding exposure. We are preparing concepts designed to raise awareness among children and young people about carcinogens to instil in them the culture of safety during their education. We further publish guidelines, tools and successful and innovative examples of the substitution of carcinogens with less hazardous substances. To improve the situation in workplaces, companies and organisations will receive assistance when seeking financial resources for the implementation of measures. Innovations will be promoted in the field of work with carcinogens and the search for practical solutions to attain a higher level of safety and health at work. The Roadmap also anticipates the support of labour inspectorates and supervisory authorities, including cooperation with, and responsibility of, employers and employees.



Let us not permit people to die just because they are diligently doing their jobs.

Let us take care of their safety.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr Alenka Škerjanc, specialist in occupational, transport and sports medicine, and the President of the Occupational Medicine Section of the European Union of Medical Specialists, for her cooperation. Without your help, we would not have been able to prepare such a content-rich programme. Thank you.

Dear Speakers,

Dear Attendees,

I wish you successful work and particularly a great deal of ambitiousness, courage and perseverance when introducing innovative solutions in your work environments.