

(2004/C 78 E/0976)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0060/04**by Hiltrud Breyer (Verts/ALE) to the Commission***(20 January 2004)**Subject: Chromium (VI) in leather*

On 18 June 2003, Directive 2003/53/EC⁽¹⁾ of the European Parliament and the Council amending for the 26th time Council Directive 79/769/EEC⁽²⁾ relating to restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations, including chromium (VI) in cement, came into force.

Various tests by industrial occupational health and safety agencies in Germany and the German TV programme 'ARD Ratgeber Bauen und Wohnen' (ARD Guide to building and living) have now shown that not only cement, but also many leather work gloves can contain extremely high levels of chromium (VI). In the case of the gloves tested, the limits imposed in the above directive were exceeded many times over. Various publications have shown this to be the case, and also for other leather products such as work shoes.

1. Is the Commission aware of these findings?
2. Does the Commission also intend to restrict the marketing of leather containing chromium (VI)? If so, when and how would this take place?

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 178, 17.7.2003, p. 24.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 262, 27.9.1976, p. 201.

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission*(23 February 2004)*

The Commission is not aware of the specific recent results of investigations in Germany that have reported high levels of chromium (VI) in a number of leather consumer products. Normally, any measure based on such findings would have been communicated to the Commission and the other Member States through the rapid notification and exchange of information system (RAPEX) of the Directive 2001/95/EEC of the Parliament and of the Council of 3 December 2001 on general product safety⁽¹⁾. To date there has been no official notification on the subject by the German authorities.

Within the framework of the Council Regulation (EEC) No 793/93⁽²⁾ a Risk Assessment (RA) of certain chromium (VI) compounds has been performed. A Risk Reduction Strategy is expected at the end of 2004.

According to the RA-report, the treatment processes applied for leather (and wood) goods within the EU are such that any exposure of consumers would be expected to be exclusively to chromium in the trivalent state and not to chromium in the hexavalent state. The report however pointed out that there was no information available concerning leather (and wood) goods imported from third countries and hence no assessment was made of the potential human health risks from the possible presence of chromium (VI) in such imported goods.

In recent months, however, the Commission has become aware of a number of scientific and lay press publications reporting the presence and release of chromium (VI) in leather consumer products (gloves, wrist bands, leather garments etc.). The Commission intends to initiate a systematic enquiry with the Member States to obtain all available information on the matter.

On the basis of the available information, the Commission will seek the advice of one of its Scientific Committees concerning the health risks that may be associated with the release of chromium (VI) in leather products with a view to implement appropriate risk reduction measures.

(¹) OJ L 11, 15.1.2002.

(²) Council Regulation (EEC) No 793/93 of 23 March 1993 on the evaluation and control of the risks of existing substances, OJ L 184, 5.4.1993.

(2004/C 78E/0977)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0064/04

by Camilo Nogueira Román (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(20 January 2004)

Subject: Alarming rise in unemployment in Galicia: 7 465 newly unemployed people in December 2003 out of a total of 23 419 for Spain as a whole, bringing the rate of unemployment in Galicia to 12,36 %

There was a steep rise in the number of unemployed people in Spain in December 2003, with 23 419 new jobless, the worst rise in the last ten years. Of these 7 465, or 32 % of the total, were in Galicia, although the region accounts for only 7 % of the population. The unemployment rate in Galicia is now 12,36 %. This adverse trend, further evidence of a link between low income and unemployment, calls for special measures to tackle both serious problems simultaneously, particularly in Objective 1 regions such as Galicia.

Is the Commission already aware of this negative trend in employment in Galicia? Is it willing to consider special development measures to combat unemployment, in liaison with the Galician and Spanish authorities?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission

(10 February 2004)

The Commission closely monitors developments in the employment situation in all of Spain's autonomous communities.

As regards Galicia, for the 2000-2006 programming period, the regional authorities submitted a regional development plan to the Commission that reflected the region's potential and weaknesses and included some employment-related measures. In response to this plan, the Commission decided to actively contribute to development in Galicia by co-financing its Integrated Operational Programme for 2000-2006. This programme stems from the Community Support Framework defining the development strategy for the Spanish regions covered by Objective 1, including creating and maintaining jobs.

The Structural Funds contributed EUR 3 430 million out of a total budget of EUR 5 087 million. The financial breakdown by Fund was as follows:

(million euro)

EC Participation	ERDF	ESF	EAGGF
Total: 3 430,058	2 335,7	392	702 358
100,00 %	68,10 %	11,43 %	20,48 %

This operational programme can be modified according to the way in which the region's job market evolves. The mid-term evaluation, laid down in Article 42 of Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 (¹), has recently been finalised. It will form the basis for any modification of the programme deemed necessary and for possible reprogramming.

(¹) Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds, OJ L 161, 26.6.1999.