



NEPSI IN ACTION Conference
Preventing Respirable Crystalline Silica Dust at Work
22 November 2022

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NEPSI, composing of 19 industry sectors and 1 Trade Union IndustriAll, are committed to enhance the health and safety of workers, through the Social Dialogue Agreement signed in 2006.

NEPSI in ACTION, a new European Project has been launched to reinforce the development and implementation at local level of tools to prevent workers exposure to respirable crystalline silica.

On 22 November 2022, the new NEPSI in ACTION started dynamically with an Opening Conference in Brussels. The NEPSI in ACTION Conference brought together over 80 participants, 6 speakers presenting the newly developed tools of NEPSI and 2 round tables with 10 panellists in total.



*NEPSI chairs, Florence Lumen and Sylvain Lefebvre, and
NEPSI Secretariat Antigoni Effraimidou*

Morning Session

Stefan Olson, the Deputy Director General of DG Employment Jobs, Skills and Social Policies, European Commission, gave a warm welcome to all panellists and participants and set the scene for a fruitful conference. He highlighted that this project and the work of NEPSI is at the core of the European cooperation and is a concrete example how a Social Dialogue Agreement works. NEPSI contributes to EU labour shortage by providing tools to keep people healthy in the workplace. In 2018, a wise decision jointly supported by the European Commission and the NEPSI Social Dialogue Agreement (SDA) was taken to put forward a binding limit value of the RCS under the European Directive on carcinogens and reprotoxic substances at work. NEPSI good practices support the implementation of the Directive.



The NEPSI Chairs, Florence Lumen and Sylvain Lefebvre presented the programme and objectives of the NEPSI in ACTION project. They stressed that the European Commission already from 2006 is present and supports NEPSI.



Lukasz Bochenek, Director of the communication and advocacy company Leidar, the Communication agency which worked with NEPSI experts to develop the new tools incorporated in a modern new website, presented the updated NEPSI Good Practice Guide. With a new design and structure, it helps the reader to go through it comfortably and identify easily the guidance task sheets which are of relevance to the industry sector in question.

Antigoni Effraimidou, the NEPSI Secretariat, introduced to the participants the new NEPSI guidance material for Small and Medium Size Enterprises and new Training tools for new workers. To attract the young generation of workers, an interactive e-learning training with reading material and quiz questions is available in a dedicated platform. Following the registrations and high interest of companies and independent workers, 3 additional training courses will be developed in the NEPSI in Action project.

The NEPSI Key Performance Indicators (KPI) reporting, a biannual exercise where the members of the NEPSI Signatories provide their sites' figures is being hosted now in a new modernized reporting system. The good 2022 NEPSI KPIs results demonstrate the continuous engagement of the signatories to monitor and improve their workplace.



Remko Houba, Occupational Hygienist, working with the IRAS of the Utrecht university NEPSI, presented the Respirable Crystalline Silica measurement protocol. This common basic methodology aims to help various sectors who do not have a standardized monitoring methodology in place measure and to collect RCS exposure data in a harmonized and representative way. Guidance is provided on measurement strategy, appropriate sampling and analytical methods, and data management.

Afternoon Session

1. The challenges and needs of SMEs regarding the prevention of exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica.



The afternoon session started with a captivating keynote speech given by the former EU MEP Claude Rolin who worked on the first revisions of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive.

The first objective is always to seek for the workers protection both for the interest of the worker and of the companies, economically and humanly. The regulatory process must integrate the reality of the small, medium and micro enterprises, so they offer the necessary protection for their workers.

NEPSI, through the years of work he has witnessed, has gained high credibility and the Good Practices of NEPSI has been cited in the texts of Council, the Commission and European Parliament. And now NEPSI is working hard to raise awareness especially for the attention of SMEs, to introduce the tools necessary for their needs. Within this new project we need to go closer to the sites, closer to the workers and encourage the involvement of new young people.

The conference continued with the panel discussion moderated by Roger Doome, the Director General of IMA-Europe. The panellists including Claude Rolin (former EU MEP), Remko Houba (NKAL, IRAS, NECORD), Catherine Delfaux (Provençale), Jean-Pierre Damm (FO Energie mines-France), and Darren Arkins (HSA Ireland, SLIC) highlighted that the primary challenges of the SMEs are the resources of the companies. The need to have the capacity to analyze the regulation, have the proper control and adapt the installations according to the regulation, which can be very costly. The workers sometimes do not realize the actual risks in a workplace and find it difficult to wear the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The NEPSI Social Dialogue Agreement help them to educate and explain the situation to workers and endorse the habit of wearing PPE. Creating a trust between the workers and employers is a must.

In relation to the construction sector the big issue is behavioural change across workers and employers.
The NEPSI SDA makes a positive impact on culture.



2. Roundtable on the attractiveness of the NEPSI sectors for future new workers, the young generation's education and training needs, the evolution and innovations of the job.



Brenda O'Brien's, Manager of Brussels Liaison Office of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU OSHA) talked about digital technology and the fact that they can provide significant opportunities that can remove workers from high-risk environments, improve working conditions and reduce workload. If we look at the impact of artificial intelligence or automation on jobs, they tend to be more skills-based. The next "Healthy Workplaces" campaign of the

EU-OSHA will be dedicated to digitalisation of work.

The second panel discussion was moderated by Isabelle Barthès, Deputy Secretary General of IndustriAll European Trade Union. The panellists Brenda O'Brien (EU OSHA), Felix Rohn (DG EMPL Skills Agenda), Antonius Johannes Schröder (TU Dortmund University), Patrick Bauer (Pro-GE) and Ramón Elul Perez (Sibelco) discussed about future new workers in NEPSI sectors. They noted that combing technological development and integrating the workers in the workplace on a social point of view is crucial. The European Commission is creating tools and recommendations to motivate individuals for training, teaching for environmental sustainability and behavioural changes. To attract new workers, an early professional orientation must be established already in schools and apprenticeship programmes must be promoted. Member States need to modernize and bring their educational system up to date. One of the most effective training tools for new workers to learn about RCS and NEPSI good practices is the use of real dust monitoring devices. When the workers visualise the problem through new technologies, it is easier to attract their attention and pass the message.



Conclusions

The key messages of the Opening Conference are:

- Transfer the conditions and reality of the SMEs into the legislation and the NEPSI guidance tools
- SMEs do not have a global vision of the situation and the knowledge of all regulatory measures
- A communication and collaboration between employers and employees is key. A trust needs to be created.
- Help workers on the behavioural changes following the legislation, using the NEPSI good practices.
- Digital technology is becoming the new form of work organisation
- NEPSI will seek to be part of the EU OSHA 3-years campaign on the digitalisation and transformation of work
- A company which is rather ecological and embrace digitalisation is an attractive working environment for the younger generation

The NEPSI Chairs thanked all the participants and all people involved to help making this event a success. Special thanks to NEPSI social partners; NEPSI employer organizations and IndustriAll Trade Union for the dedication to NEPSI.

We look forward of 2 years of travelling to engage and disseminate the tools at national level through local seminars in eight different countries across Europe.

