



Joint recommendations on safe and healthy workplaces in the Chemical, Pharmaceutical, Plastics and Rubber Industries in times of COVID-19

The Covid-19 crisis hit Europe unprepared, the virus posed unseen and unforeseen challenges to governments, companies and workers. After a few months of emergency responses – from suspended, reduced or increased production (depending on the sector) to the quest to secure personal protective equipment – Europe now embarks on the next step towards a new normal. For Occupational Safety and Health at work, this means a wide range of measures and precautions for all occupations and workplaces. Many companies have already established resumption or continuity plans, management and trade unions have cooperated to ensure safe working conditions. Some are still looking for guidance as they proceed with a step-by-step restart of their operations.

Objective:

The Social Partners of the Chemical, Pharmaceutical, Plastics and Rubber Industries, industriAll European Trade Union and the European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG) wish to express their commitment to a swift economic recovery, fully respecting safe and healthy work conditions in the entire industry.

Understanding that there can be no “one size fits all” approach, ECEG and industriAll Europe wish to draw attention to the guidelines issued by tripartite entities such as EU-OSHA¹ or ILO² on the safe return to work and share examples of sector agreements already negotiated.

These recommendations are meant to support employers and protect workers in the world of work and to encourage that workers and their relevant committees or representative bodies are involved in general risk assessment, design and implementation of measures.

The Annex to this statement provides a collection of agreements or recommendations of our member organisations, and will be updated whenever industriAll Europe or ECEG receive additional examples.

¹ [EU-OSHA: COVID-19: Back to the workplace -Adapting workplaces and protecting workers](#)

² [ILO: A safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)



Social Dialogue at Company Level

Every business, whatever its size, is encouraged to draw up (a) contingency/continuity plan(s) to ensure the protection of its personnel and the maintenance of its activities. Social Dialogue and the involvement of workers' health and safety representatives are essential.

ECEG and industriAll Europe recommend a general risk assessmentⁱ. Company level social partners should collaborate to identify and implement necessary measures. Plans should not only cover preventive measures but also establish emergency preparedness procedures in case of a new outbreak of the virus.

The adopted measures should take into account not only all personnel but also suppliers, clients and visitors and ideally be repeated and reviewed regularly.

Information to employees and visitors

Communication is crucial.

Employers are responsible for providing adequate information and specific COVID-19 training. Workers are responsible for following established procedures and participating in training organised by the employer.

Everyone accessing a company's premises needs to be informed about all the rules in place.

Plans should cover:

- Hygiene measures
- Personal Protective Equipment for workplaces with a job-related risk of COVID-19
- Social Distancing
- Remote working
- Reorganisation of working hours / shift systems
- Limiting the number of persons in changing rooms, canteens, etc.
- Reorganisation of entry and exit points

Other considerations

Beyond immediately visible risks and their mitigation, ECEG and industriAll Europe encourage their members to jointly examine: possible chemical hazards resulting from increased use of cleaning and disinfectant agents, ergonomic risks from awkward postures due to inadequate facilities and equipment (due to forced telework), psychosocial risksⁱⁱ, etc.



The needs of workers with higher health risks and/or special needs should be considered. Risks assessment and measures should be gender-sensitive.

No person officially recognized as being at risk during a health crisis should be dismissed because of his/her belonging to a risk group. The European Social Partners recommend to discuss appropriate measures for these people on company level taking into account the individual situation and workplace.

Dissemination

industriAll Europe and ECEG will disseminate and promote these recommendations among their respective members, taking into account national practices.

Social partners at all levels have an important role to play to reduce the risk of contamination at work.

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ⁱ COVID-19 has been classified in risk group 3 of biological agents by the European Commission. Member States have five months to transpose this modification into their national legislation. This classification implies, among other things, that the employer is required to have a risk assessment carried out, only in those workplaces where the presence of the biological agent is a peculiarity of the work itself (i.e. hospitals, laboratories, etc.).

ⁱⁱ Social partners are aware that different definitions and regulatory frameworks exist throughout Europe.

Annex:

- **Joint Social Partners' or tripartite H&S guides and protocols issued at Member States' level:**
 - Belgium: <https://internationalview.org/2020/05/02/corona-gids-guide-leitfaden-documentation/>
 - Italy, Federchimica: https://www.confindustria.it/wcm/connect/97e754f1-3e16-4c34-abb3-b94b6ee215ba/Common+regulatory+protocol_24042020_clean.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-97e754f1-3e16-4c34-abb3-b94b6ee215ba-n75wSvG
 - Spain: <https://www.feique.org/pdfs/Recomendaciones-para-la-proteccion-de-la-salud-de-los-trabajadores-frente-al-covid-19-en-la-industria-quimica.pdf>

- **Employers' H&S guides and protocols issued at Member States' level:**
 - France, France Chimie: <https://www.francechimie.fr/media/2dd/pratiques-coronavirus-branche-chimie-rev4-2020-07-06.pdf>

- **H&S guides and protocols issued from authorities at Member States' level:**
 - Germany: https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/PDF-Schwerpunkte/sars-cov-2-arbeitsschutzstandard.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1
 - Germany: <https://www.bgrci.de/praevention/coronavirus/>