

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3850/03
by Jan Andersson (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Harmful isocyanates and the protection of workers

Isocyanates are basic chemicals that are used primarily in the production of polyurethane foam, and polyurethane elastomers, etc. Isocyanates are thus found in chemical products such as paints, varnishes, surface treatments, adhesives and sealing compounds. It has recently been discovered that exposure to isocyanates also arises when mineral wool, glass wool and bakelite, etc. are heated.

For a long time now, the production and use of isocyanates has been on the increase. Most western European countries apply the same occupational exposure limits (0.005 ppm). However, studies show that the methods that have been used for many years to measure isocyanates in Europe are inadequate. Therefore, trade unions in the EU are calling for European rules for the industrial use of products that contain, or can emit, isocyanates.

1. Is the Commission aware of the harmful nature of isocyanates and the risks of exposure run by workers in many industries?
2. Does the Commission intend to take any measures and lay down European rules for the protection of workers from isocyanates?