

**Question for written answer E-005193/2014  
to the Commission**

Rule 117

**Marisa Matias (GUE/NGL) and Alda Sousa (GUE/NGL)**

**Subject:** Water supply pipes containing asbestos and supply failures

The Commission has already acknowledged the fact that drinking water quality and public health are directly put at risk by frequent water supply cuts (answer to parliamentary question E-002348/2008).

The inhabitants of Vila da Marmeleira in Santarém District, Portugal, have been experiencing such a situation of frequent water supply cuts for over 10 years now, because the pipes used are now over 50 years old and were designed to supply only public drinking fountains and not people's homes in general. Moreover, these pipes are made of asbestos cement.

When questioned on this problem in 2011 by the left-wing group in the Portuguese parliament, the Minister for the Environment answered that 'although asbestos is considered a known carcinogen when inhaled, no recommended level has been set for asbestos in drinking water because there have been no epidemiological studies demonstrating a risk to human health associated with the ingestion of asbestos in water' (answer to question 3803/XI/2).

According to the Commission, however, there have been studies showing causality with asbestos-induced cancer – mesothelioma – in the inner lining of the abdominal cavity, suggesting that asbestos fibres in water or food may penetrate the body through the bowel wall and cause cancer (answer to parliamentary question E-002348/2008). Therefore, the precautionary principle, which has been enshrined in European legislation since 1999, requires that water pipes containing asbestos should not be used (Directive 1999/77/EC).

Furthermore, having asbestos fibres in the water supply does not only mean that asbestos will be ingested in drinks. Water is also used for personal hygiene, washing clothes, cleaning the house, etc. When the water dries after these activities, fibres are released and can be inhaled by human beings. Therefore, water containing asbestos fibres can cause these fibres to be inhaled. The situation is made worse if there are frequent cuts in the water supply, which increase the number of asbestos fibres entering the water from the pipes, since when air gets into the pipes it exacerbates the risk of damage to their inner lining.

What urgent measures does the Commission intend to adopt to ensure that the old, asbestos-containing water pipes that supply the people of Vila da Marmeleira – and other similar cases – are replaced as quickly as possible, so as to remove the danger and ensure an uninterrupted supply of water?