



European Commission - Speech
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Press remarks by Commissioner Schmit on the launch of the 2020-2022 EU-OSHA campaign 'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load' on the prevention of work-related musculoskeletal disorders

Brussels, 12 October 2020

Very good afternoon to everyone behind the screens.

Let me start by saying that it is of course a great pity that we cannot meet in person but in the current circumstances this is for the best. Indeed, physical distancing - I prefer this term to 'social distancing' - is among the most effective means to protect each other and those who work with us.

This pandemic has shown us how tightly health and work are linked.

It has shown us that being mindful of health and safety conditions at work can save lives.

And it has shown us just how crucial occupational health and safety is for our protection, for the prevention of further contagion, for the functioning of our society, and for the continuity of all activities.

I am proud of the determined action of the European Commission during the pandemic. Several ambitious initiatives have been taken to tackle the challenges.

For instance, you will remember that, at the beginning of the pandemic, shortages of personal protective equipment appeared in some EU countries.

In order to support Member States, the Commission rapidly launched a joint procurement initiative and created a strategic stockpile of medical equipment such as protective masks.

I am also very proud of the successful work that we are doing with the European Agency for health and safety at work, EU-OSHA in Bilbao.

We are closely cooperating to provide employers, workers and other partners with relevant and reliable practical information to deal with the challenges raised by the pandemic.

Both OSHA's guidance on COVID-19 at the workplace and their guidance on return to work are very good examples.

Today we address an issue which, with the backdrop of the pandemic, might sometimes be forgotten. However, the truth is that this is actually something that has been exacerbated by this crisis.

I am talking about work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders. This is the campaign we are launching today together with EU-OSHA and the German Presidency.

Many of us – 3 in 5 – have experienced backache, stiff muscles or a sore neck as a result of our work. This can severely affect our everyday lives and it can be detrimental to our physical and mental health.

As a consequence, these disorders can result in increased absences from work, loss of productivity and for the companies that means reduced competitiveness.

Now that for certain professions working from home has become a norm rather than an exception, the correct ergonomic conditions may be even more difficult to ensure.

I am therefore glad that the EU-OSHA Campaign on Musculoskeletal Disorders will pay particular attention to teleworking.

EU-OSHA works very closely with the relevant stakeholders in the occupational health and safety area, such as Member States, national Focal Points, Social Partners, experts and preventive services.

In the EU, we have learnt that together we are stronger.

And maybe this is also why I am not a fan of the expression 'social distancing'. 'Social' relates to

society and living together. This is why I think that even when physically apart, we should redouble our efforts to continue working together to address challenges ahead.

Dr. Sedlatscheck will give you more details about the kind of guidance and materials that are available as part of this important campaign. I encourage all employers – and workers – to take make use of this guidance and stay healthy.

Ensuring the best possible work environment is critical for the health and wellbeing of the workforce. With the pandemic affecting how we live and work, we can all benefit from the guidance and resources published today.

I reiterate my full support to this campaign and wish it the greatest success. Thank you very much.

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