



## Commission to fund chemicals risk management system for construction SMEs

Brussels, 22nd April 2008

FIEC and the Norwegian Contractors Association (EBA) have been formally notified by the European Commission that it has recommended funding be made available for a research project known as *ChemXchange*, which will develop a cost effective management system for exchanging information and managing risks of chemicals in the construction industry. Contract negotiations are currently on-going, and the project will be formally started in autumn 2008.

The construction sector is a major downstream user of chemicals and chemical containing articles and is one of the sectors exposed to the highest risks regarding dangerous substances. The industry is dependent on particularly high-risk substances including EU priority ones that have CMR (Carcinogenic, Mutagenic and toxic for Reproduction) and PBT (Persistent, Bioaccumulative and Toxic in the environment) characteristics.

Research indicates that as many as 88% of European firms do not comply with risk prevention regulations regarding substances with known toxicological risks. Moreover, it has been estimated that chemical exposure costs the construction industry at least 98 million days and almost 2 million cases of illness every year. Associated direct costs are estimated to be nearly 75 billion € per annum. A recent coordinated inspection campaign by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) has confirmed this by exposing a high level of non-compliance with legislation.

*ChemXchange* is aimed at fulfilling the acute needs of the construction sector in complying with the new European chemical legislation (REACH) including challenges connected with chemical risk assessment, chemical communication and chemical management. *ChemXchange* will offer the construction industry a tailor-made, low cost, fully digitalised system that centralises the collection and quality assurance of the required chemical information.

The project consortium will consist of 13 participants drawn from 5 European countries and will be financed under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme "Research for SME Associations". It will last 36 months and will be led by 4 SME associations: EBA (coordinator), FIEC, the International Union of Painting Contractors (UNIPE), the European Mechanical Contractors' Association - International Union of Roofing and Plumbing Contractors (GCI-UICP); a Core Group of at least 4 SME: CoBuilder (N), Womreks OÜ (EST), Lu.Ge.A (I), MDA Consulting (UK); and 4 RTD performers: National Institute of Technology TI (N), UK Intelligent Systems Research Institute (ISRI), Kaunas University of Technology KTU (LT) and LABOR S.r.l. (I).

FIEC especially welcomes the news that *ChemXchange* will receive European Commission funding since this success instigated by its Norwegian federation is exemplary of what can be done by SME associations under the European framework programme for research to assist construction firms in the practical implementation of EU legislation.

*FIEC is the European Construction Industry Federation, representing via its 33 national Member Federations in 28 countries (26 EU & EFTA, Croatia and Turkey) construction enterprises of all sizes, i.e. small and medium-sized enterprises as well as "global players", carrying out all forms of building and civil engineering activities.*

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