**HBM4EU occupational biomonitoring study on chromium and other harmful chemicals**

**Information for Participating Companies**

**Introduction**

We would like to invite your company to take part in HBM4EU (Human Biomonitoring for Europe), a pan-European study which aims to investigate workers’ exposure to hazardous chemicals in the workplace.

HMB4EU is a European project running from 2017 to 2021 and including experts from 28 European countries and European Union agencies. It is funded by the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 Program and by our national governments. Further details can be found at <https://www.hbm4eu.eu/about-hbm4eu/>.

We are reaching out to companies authorized to use hexavalent chromium Cr(VI) under the EU REACH Regulation and affected by the proposition to limit workers’ exposure to Cr(VI) and other chemicals under the EU Directive on carcinogens or mutagens at work (Directive 2004/37/EC). Your participation can further benefit your company’s risk assessment & management and corporate responsibility practices. Our role is completely funded and participation into the project does not result in any out-of-pocket costs for your company.

**About the study**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the exposure to carcinogenic hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) at the European workplaces and to evaluate if the current safety and control measures are able to protect workers from harmful exposure. Secondly, we are testing the utility of new, more specific methods to assess the worker’s exposure to hexavalent chromium from the human samples. These methods will avoid the confounding effect caused by the exposure to less harmful trivalent chromium.

We will also evaluate the exposure to nickel, manganese, and perfluoroalkylated substances if exposure to such chemicals is anticipated in your company. Biological monitoring in urine, blood and breathing samples will be the main method in the assessment of exposure, but industrial hygienic sample (air and hand wipe) measurements might be also carried out.

From each participating company, we will need up to a total of 15 workers, as follows:

1. up to 10 workers whose duties involve welding or surface treatment activities (however, if the company has e.g. multiple sites or multiple processes falling under the scope of the study, also higher number of participating workers is possible), and
2. up to 5 workers who do not have such duties, to be used as a comparison group.

**What does my company have to do if we agree to take part?**

Once your company agrees to participate, the next steps are:

1. Following your signed consent, our Research Team will contact you to arrange a suitable time for our team members to visit your premises and speak to you and your workers about our study. An information leaflet will be given to your workers. Workers will then have to agree to participate by signing their own consent forms.
2. Our research team will visit your company on an agreed date to take biological and hygienic samples from participating workers and to ask them a few questions about their background and working routines, and to collect information on the relevant processes and work activities.
3. If we have your permission, we may take photographs of relevant processes and work activities, which will be amended such that workers or the company cannot be identified. This material may be also used for demonstration purposes in the information session in which results of the study are presented in your company.
4. Samples and information will be taken from your workers during working hours.
5. The duration of sampling and information collection will depend on the category of the participant, i.e. exposed versus unexposed. For chromium exposed worker’s it will take two times 15 minutes to give a breath sample and about 10-15 minutes to fill the questionnaire. Time will be needed also for two blood samplings and urine samples. For unexposed workers each sample is given only once.
6. Once samples are gathered, information regarding your company and workers’ names will be coded and anonymity will be guaranteed.
7. Samples and information gathered from your workers will then go for analysis.

**What are the benefits for the companies participating to the study?**

This Pan-European study will help you to comply with your possible obligations under EU chemical legislation (REACH) and/or your obligations under the EU Directive on carcinogens or mutagens at work (Directive 2004/37/EC), which will set an EU-wide binding limit value (BOELV) for the exposure to hexavalent chromium exposure at work.

By participating, your company will:

* Receive an electronic copy of the report with the collective results of the study published on the website of the HBM4EU project. The report will not contain any information identifying your company or your workers.
* Receive your company-specific hygienic report electronically. The report will include recommendations for thesurveillance and monitoring procedures of your workers.
* You can also choose to receive an electronic report of the collective urinary chromium biomonitoring results of your workers, but will not receive individual results. Your workers will receive their personal chromium exposure results.
* Your workers will gain awareness regarding the safety measures that they need to follow when carrying out activities involving exposure to hexavalent chromium

**Does our company have to take part?**

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

However, even if you sign the consent form you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving reason and we will not approach any member of your staff to participate in the study. However, we will retain right to use any samples collected prior to the withdrawal in a confidential manner.

**Are there any risks if my company joins HBM4EU?**

There are no risks involved if your company joins HBM4EU, and your company’s name will not be disclosed no matter what the results regarding chemical exposure.

**How will my company’s privacy be guaranteed?**

* Participants are anonymous as their names are replaced with a code, and therefore cannot be traced as working for your company.
* Any information that may lead to the identification of a worker or your company will not be stated in any published reports i.e. country or company name.
* Computer security will be used to block any unauthorised access and all paper records will be securely stored.
* Information or samples provided to researchers will not include your company’s registration numbers.
* Any results reported by this study will not contain information that may identify your company or staff. Only anonymous results of research conducted by the research team will be published and made available on the study’s website: <https://www.hbm4eu.eu/>

**Are there any costs involved?**

There are no costs involved except brief working time of your staff members allocated for this study.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The study is reviewed by the Bioethics committees and the Data protection commissioners of [Country]

**Who do I contact if I would like more information about the hexavalent chromium study?**

**You can always reach out to** [Name Surname of Research Coordinator of the Country]

**Tel:** [xxxxxxx] **Email:** [xxxxxxxx]