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BCA Member Companies prepared for new Chromium (VI)¹ Directive

New European legislation controlling chromium (VI) levels in cement and cement-containing preparations came into effect in the UK on 17 January 2005. One of the most important consequences for the Portland cement industry and its customers is the introduction of a limited storage period (shelf life) for treated cements. Delivery documents and cement bags will, where necessary, carry a despatch/packaging date and shelf life as required by the legislation.

Many cements and cement-based products naturally contain soluble chromium (VI) trace metal as 'chromate'. The Chromium (VI) Directive is designed to minimise chromate related allergic dermatitis arising from the unprotected use of cement. Chromium (VI) is only active in wet cement, and once hardened, concrete and mortars become and remain safe to touch, even in wet conditions.

Under the new Directive, BCA Member Companies will ensure that their cements have levels of soluble chromium (VI) when water is added that are no more than two parts per million by mass of the dry cement. This means that small amounts of reducing agents will be added where necessary to control the quantity of soluble chromium (VI). As reducing agents are only active for a limited period, it will be necessary to declare a shelf life of 61 days for treated cement during which the very low level of chromium (VI) is maintained.

Mike Gilbert, Chief Executive of the British Cement Association (BCA) said: "Cements produced by BCA Member Companies already have lower chromium contents than many of their European counterparts. Safety is one of the industry's core values and BCA's members have voluntarily been displaying a health warning on bags for years, stating that cement contains chromium (VI). We also advocate that people always wear protective boots, gloves and eye protection whenever they work with wet cement or concrete."

¹ (VI) = Six

Not everyone is susceptible to allergic dermatitis. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), only 5% to 10% of construction workers might be sensitive. But both the HSE and industry leaders stress that despite these new measures, the correct personal protective equipment should always be worn when handling cement to protect against dermatitis and cement burns.

The industry is acting responsibly and is involved in widespread consultation with the HSE and customers. More than £10 million has already been invested in preparation for the new legislation to ensure that BCA Member Companies can comply with the regulations in full.

A HSE Communications Task Force has advised that suppliers, such as distributors, merchants and retailers, are not expected to dispose of all stock manufactured before 17 January 2005, but that good stock control and rotation will be necessary to ensure that untreated cement is moved off the market as soon as practicable.

Detailed information sheets on the directive and its implications are available on the British Cement Association's website, www.cementindustry.co.uk. Q&A on Chromium (VI) - [Link to Q&A](#)

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Notes to editors:

The British Cement Association (BCA) is the trade and research organisation that represents the interests of the United Kingdom's cement industry in its relations with Her Majesty's Government, the European Union and relevant organisations in the United Kingdom. The members of the BCA (Buxton Lime Industries, Castle Cement, Lafarge Cement UK and Rugby Cement) are the major domestic manufacturers of Portland cement producing over 90% of the cement sold in the UK.

The cement industry has an annual turnover of £750 million and is a major supplier to the construction industry. It employs around 3,500 people directly with a further 15,000 jobs depending upon its operations.