Joint declaration on Preparedness in the European aggregates sector

Anticipating risks, protecting workers and strengthening preparedness

Aggregates Europe and industriAll Europe, the European sectoral social partners in the aggregates sector, recognise that Europe is facing increasingly complex and interconnected risks. These include climate change and extreme weather events, industrial and health emergencies, cyberattacks, energy and supply disruptions, geopolitical tensions and security threats. Aggregates Europe previously published its own Preparedness Guidance for Aggregates Producers detailing the pivotal role the industry plays in crisis preparedness and response. Further building on this initiative, the European sectoral social partners in the aggregates sector came together to produce this joint declaration on Preparedness in the European Aggregates Sector.

The European aggregates industry, including quarrying, open pit extraction of sand and gravel and aggregates recycling, plays a vital role in European society. Aggregates are indispensable for housing, transport networks, energy infrastructure, flood protection and other critical infrastructure. In times of crisis, the sector's workers, materials, machinery, infrastructure and technical expertise can be vital for protecting communities, supporting emergency services and rapidly maintaining or restoring critical infrastructure. The sector, its companies and its skilled workforce therefore make an essential contribution throughout the crisis cycle, from preparedness and immediate response to recovery and reconstruction. Preparedness must therefore address both the ability of the aggregates industry to anticipate, withstand and respond to crises and its vital contribution to society before, during and after such crises.

The European social partners consider preparedness to be the collective capacity to anticipate, prevent, withstand, respond to and recover from crises. Preparedness should follow an all risks approach and must be built through effective social dialogue, adequate investment, protection of workers and safe and sustainable operations.

Our joint principles

Anticipation and prevention

Preparedness begins before a crisis occurs. Risks should be identified and assessed at the appropriate level, taking account of local conditions and the specific characteristics of each workplace. Social partners and workers' representatives should be involved at the relevant levels in identifying risks and developing preparedness measures.

Preparedness should be integrated into company planning, risk prevention, investment, training and skills policies. Plans should be regularly assessed and updated, including following exercises, incidents or changes in identified risks.

Worker information and participation

Workers possess essential knowledge of production processes, equipment and workplace risks. Their participation contributes to more effective and realistic preparedness.

Workers and their representatives should be involved, receive appropriate information and be consulted on preparedness plans, risk assessments and measures that may affect working conditions, health and safety, employment or skills. Social dialogue and existing information and consultation rights shall be fully respected.

Health, safety and wellbeing

The protection of workers must remain the first priority during any crisis. Emergency situations must not lead to lower health and safety standards.

Preparedness plans should include clear arrangements for early warning, communication, evacuation, safe shutdown and the safe resumption of operations. They should also address adequate staffing, working time, rest periods, protective equipment and access to occupational health services.

All workers present at a site, including workers employed by contractors, subcontractors and temporary work agencies, should be covered by relevant information, training and protection measures by their respective employers.

Workers should receive the necessary preparedness and emergency training during paid working time. They should also be able to raise concerns and report risks without fear of negative consequences.

Quality jobs, skills and Just Transition

In times of crisis, the aggregates industry can fulfil its vital role only if it has sufficient numbers of well trained and experienced workers in quality jobs. Adequate staffing, safe working conditions and the right skills are essential for protecting workers, maintaining critical activities and supporting emergency response and recovery. The social partners therefore underline the importance of sustained investment in employment, qualifications, training and lifelong learning in line with European, national and regional law.

Preparedness should also include the anticipation of longer term changes affecting the sector, including climate change, decarbonisation, digitalisation, automation, circularity, changes in demand and the transformation of regional economies.

These changes should be anticipated and managed through social dialogue and in line with Just Transition principles. Where changes may affect employment or working conditions, appropriate measures should be considered, including training, reskilling, redeployment and employment protection.

Cooperation during emergencies

The European aggregates industry may support public and civil protection authorities by providing materials, machinery, infrastructure and technical expertise during emergencies and reconstruction.

Any such cooperation should be based on clear and previously established arrangements. These should define responsibilities, coordination, training, insurance, occupational safety, working time and the conditions under which workers and equipment may be deployed.

Tasks assigned to workers during an emergency should correspond to their skills and training and must be subject to appropriate risk assessment and protection. Any specific arrangements concerning essential activities or workers must comply with applicable law and be negotiated with workers and their representatives.

Supporting society through fair and sustainable preparedness

Public policies supporting preparedness and resilience should promote safe and sustainable industrial activity, quality employment, skills development and social dialogue.

Preparedness measures should be consistent with Europe's climate and environmental objectives. They should contribute to resilient infrastructure, responsible access to materials, efficient resource use, circularity and the adaptation of workplaces and communities to climate change.

Emergency situations should not be used to bypass workers' rights, occupational health and safety requirements, social dialogue or applicable environmental protections.

Next steps

Aggregates Europe and industriAll Europe commit to promoting preparedness through social dialogue at European, national, company and workplace levels.

The social partners invite companies, workers and their representatives to discuss relevant risks and preparedness arrangements, taking account of national industrial relations systems and legislation.
The social partners also call on the European Commission and national authorities to involve social partners in the development and implementation of preparedness policies affecting the aggregates industry.

This declaration provides a common political basis for further dialogue. Aggregates Europe and industriAll Europe will assess its implementation after one year of its publication and consider possible follow up activities, including the exchange of good practices and the development of practical tools, training or joint projects.