



GLOBE
EUROPEAN UNION EU

Event Summary

GLOBE EU event on indoor environmental quality – March 30, 2017

Co-chairs: Sirpa Pietikäinen MEP and Anneli Jäätteenmäki MEP

Roberta Savli (European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Association) opened by mentioning that indoor air quality not only impacts health but productivity levels; indeed, besides households, it affects school and office environments. Although there seems to be no lack of interest from MEPs, parts of the European Commission consider indoor air quality an issue that needs to be dealt with privately.

Bart Ingelaere (Belgian Building Research Institute) followed by stating that rising noise levels caused by urbanization increasingly impact public health; a lack of acoustic insulation often results in sleep disturbances and hypertension. He said that architects and construction companies are frequently not aware of the many solutions that exist to reduce noise pollution. Acoustic protection, however, is simple to install and not overly expensive.

Josefina Lindblom (DG ENV – B.1) completed the introductions by informing participants that the Commission expects to finish a framework of core indicators by July 2017; she mentioned that the framework will be voluntary so as to accommodate the mainstream market: it will be simple but comprehensive. Whereas it should be possible to integrate the framework in certification schemes, it should not amount to EU-wide benchmarks. She concluded by submitting that a high level of transparency ought to result in greater reliability of the data used in reporting.

Comments and discussion:

VOCs, carcinogenic VOCs, R-value, and formaldehyde for products, and benzene and particulates (PM2.5 and PM10) for external sources will be included in the framework as will relative humidity. Flame retardant chemicals may be included in the framework in future.

A testing period for the framework will start in the autumn of 2017. Guidelines will be issued for different sectors with green public procurement mentioned as a first target for the use of indicators. Criteria based on the framework could be linked to structural funds to impact investments.

It was commented that measuring particles and components in ambient air is becoming very affordable. These technologies could be linked to ventilation systems.

A clear definition of indoor environmental quality in the EPBD (Energy Performance of Buildings Directive) recast was requested in order to achieve healthy and comfortable environments. The lifecycle aspect of buildings (costing and impact) should also be part of the recast which should, in addition, have a clear trajectory. It was recommended that the EPBD be more holistic by referencing the indicators in the recast. DG ENER is reluctant, however, to take anything other than energy-efficiency into account. The timing of the recast is unfortunate because DG ENV is in no position to offer robust proposals yet.

It was commented that a sense of urgency seems to be missing on this issue. Although the core indicators framework is a big step in the right direction, an EU paper would be necessary to outline what needs to be done and by whom. Current efforts focus on harmonizing already existing regulation. Some participants complained that not a single Commission entity appears to be taking the lead on integrating indoor environmental quality.

SDG reporting was suggested as possibly presenting an opportunity to include indicators. It was also suggested that the organizations present at the meeting could establish a sustainable building and deep renovation caucus.

Indicators are important not only for sustainability in the building sector but also for property investors and in order to put a value on real estate (including mortgage rate calculations).

There are no technical or financial barriers to including acoustics when renovating a building. Knowledge, however, is often lacking. While acoustics do not get the attention it deserves in the Commission's proposal, it was mentioned that stakeholders are not opposed to including acoustics as a point of attention; they do not, however, want it included as an indicator.

More data on indoor environment would be desirable but should not be overwhelming; indeed, the indicators framework should not be a burden on the building sector.

Conclusions:

Data (metrics) and data gathering (measurement) remain important as well as understanding which regulations should be targeted. Especially the inclusion of chemicals that do not yet exist (precautionary principle) was mentioned as an issue. Also, the importance of connecting stakeholders to provide input on these issues was highlighted.

Finally, it was stated that improving energy efficiency in buildings appears to get most of the attention. Renovating buildings should not come at the expense of public health and well-being, however, by ignoring all other elements that contribute to the quality of indoor environment.