

BESA puzzled by missed opportunity to mandate clean air

3 years ago



[The Building Engineering Services Association \(BESA\)](#) says it is surprised that changes to pollution laws announced by the government ignore the importance of indoor air quality (IAQ) and do not reflect the latest advice from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Association welcomed new measures from the Department for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) aimed at helping local authorities create clean air zones under the terms of the new Environment Act, but said it was “puzzled” by the failure to include IAQ.

“BESA, along with other industry bodies and many health professionals, has been urging the government to use its new powers under the Act to mandate higher standards of IAQ – so this is another missed opportunity,” said Nathan Wood, chair of BESA’s Health & Well-being in Buildings group.

“There is now a wealth of guidance freely available to help building managers achieve healthier and safer indoor environments quickly and cost-effectively. It is hard to understand, therefore, why this is not being mandated particularly considering all that we learned during the pandemic about the importance of good ventilation, for example.”

BESA has published [three pieces of free guidance](#) outlining practical measures to tackle the specific challenge of reducing airborne contaminants inside buildings. It points out that, as people spend more than 90% of their time indoors, it is increasingly urgent that more time and money is spent on addressing IAQ.

Pledge

Its guidance has been adopted by [a coalition of trade unions and scientists as part of an ‘employers’](#)

[pledge' to improve conditions in workplaces](#) following the pandemic – and was the basis of BESA's response to the DEFRA consultation about the new measures.

As well as setting more ambitious targets for reducing general pollution, the Association believes the government should set specific targets for IAQ so that buildings can become 'safe havens' that enhance the health, well-being, and productivity of occupants while the longer-term work of cleaning up the external environment goes on.

The government has designated National Highways as the first 'relevant authority' with a statutory duty to develop plans for reducing road pollution and has brought in requirements for local authorities to declare 'air quality management areas' with deadlines for reducing pollution.

However, it has retained its headline target to halve the limit on fine particles (PM2.5) in England from an annual average of 20 to 10 micrograms per cubic metre of air by 2040 – but this is double the level recommended by the WHO.

"Numerous studies have shown that PM2.5 contributes to heart attacks and strokes – and increases the risk of severe asthma cases and lung cancer," said Wood, who will be chairing a major panel discussion on the topic of healthy buildings at the [BESA National Conference in October](#).

"Surely, our national targets should be aligned with the WHO's advice at the very least. Also, setting a goal 18 years into the future condemns another whole generation of children to impaired lung function and increasingly severe asthma attacks.

"The Environment Act should be the vehicle for setting a new healthy standard for indoor spaces," said Wood. "The government cannot continue missing opportunities to progress readily available measures for creating safe havens."

For more information about the BESA National Conference 2022 [click here](#)

BESA's three free guides to IAQ can be downloaded [here](#).