

“Whitty report can be turning point for ventilation”

3 years ago



The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) says support from the UK’s Chief Medical Officer for more investment in indoor air quality (IAQ) could unleash a wave of ventilation improvements in buildings.

The Association praised Professor Chris Whitty for making air quality the focus of his [2022 annual report](#) and for making better IAQ a medical priority.

He wrote that IAQ was becoming “an increasing proportion of the overall problem” as some progress had been made on tackling outdoor pollution, so dealing with problems inside buildings should now be a priority.

Professor Whitty made 15 recommendations in the report including ensuring effective ventilation while minimising energy use and heat loss. He also called for more research into tackling indoor air pollution including finding ways to reduce contaminant sources, adding that the necessary technical solutions were widely available.

His report stated that people spend around 80% of their time indoors* and often had no choice over where to spend that time, but there had been far less research and investment in IAQ in comparison to outdoor pollution. “Air pollution has improved and will continue improving provided we are active in tackling it. We can and should go further – and it is technically possible to do so,” said Professor Whitty.

BESA chief executive David Frise said it was significant that the CMO had chosen to make air quality the focus of his report this year and praised Professor Whitty for taking on board several of the lessons learned about the role of building ventilation during the pandemic.

Productivity

“Poorly ventilated indoor spaces were shown to significantly increase the risk of infection transmission,” said Frise. “Better ventilation and air filtration are also proven to enhance health and well-being (including mental health), improve sleep quality, and boost productivity.

“The case for increased investment in ventilation solutions is persuasive and the intervention of the country’s top medical official could be a real turning point for investment in ventilation as it should make anyone who has responsibility for conditions inside buildings sit up and take notice.”

World Health Organisation (WHO) child health advocate Rosamund Adoo Kissi-Debrah said that people would continue to die unless governments and the ventilation industry worked together to improve IAQ.

“The NHS will not be able to reduce its waiting lists until we clean up our air,” she told a BESA webinar marking the first ever [World Ventilation Day](#) on November 8. “It is also much easier to control the indoor air than the outdoor – so tackling IAQ is a great way to give people back power over their own environment and save lives.”

The WHO has established that 3.8 million premature deaths worldwide are linked to poor indoor air every year out of a total of 8.7 million from general air pollution – and Rochdale Coroner’s Court ruled last month that the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak was directly linked to his exposure to damp and mould in a poorly ventilated flat.

“We have to be clear about this...bad IAQ leads directly to deaths,” said Kissi-Debrah whose daughter Ella died from a severe asthma attack in 2013 and is the first person in the UK to have air pollution stated on her death certificate.

The House of Commons is currently debating a draft Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill – also known as ‘Ella’s Law – which has been approved by the House of Lords.

The Bill sets out the responsibilities of all building operators to monitor and report on the quality of air in their buildings. It states that indoor targets must be in line with the latest guidance from the WHO including those for ultrafine particles and nitrogen dioxide.

The London Assembly has already voted unanimously to support Ella’s Law and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Minister, Lord Benyon, said acting on pollution was “an absolute necessity”. He added that the government could already use the legal framework created by the renewed Environment Act 2021 to stiffen air quality targets and enforcement.

*Some experts believe this figure is closer to 90% for at least 90% of the population.

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