

Two years to 'fix indoor air quality'

10 months ago



The change of government means the UK has a rare opportunity to add long overdue indoor air quality (IAQ) measures to revised building regulations, according to messages emerging from the third annual [World Ventilation Day](#) (#WorldVentil8Day).

Speakers at an event hosted by the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) in London called for a concerted effort to persuade the new administration to include IAQ measures in its [Warm Homes plan](#) by reforming the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) system.

The meeting, which was one of several being held around the world, heard that 65,000 UK homes suffered from serious mould and damp leading to over 10,000 deaths each year linked to respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease and mental health.

Yselkla Farmer, chief executive of the energy and infrastructure trade association [BEAMA](#), launched a policy paper at the BESA event that called for a new assessment approach that puts the principle of occupant health at the heart of building retrofits. She said the industry now had a “two-year window of opportunity” to get this fixed in the building regulations.

Farmer said that ventilation and IAQ was the “poor relation to energy efficiency” when it came to assessing building performance, which meant residents’ health was being compromised.

“The push for better energy performance in buildings [has led to] a clear disconnect with the need to ensure building occupants are healthy. This has played a significant role in creating what is now a national health crisis,” said Farmer.

Decent standard

The government claims that its [Warm Homes plan](#) will lift more than one million households out of fuel

poverty by improving minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) for rental properties and will “bring all homes up to a decent standard by 2030”.

As an EPC is required by law when anyone sells or rents a home BEAMA believes this could drive up IAQ requirements in more than 400,000 homes every year.

“IAQ should have the same focus as fire and electrical safety in the building regulations. Why is this issue, which actually causes more deaths, still a ‘voluntary’ compliance area?” said Farmer. “[Warm Homes and EPCs] are a legislative framework we can work with – so let’s use this window of opportunity.”

The London event, which also featured representatives from several other UK building services trade bodies, agreed that regulation was essential to ensure improvements happened at scale.

BESA Indoor Air Quality Group chair Adam Taylor said the government should also support a public awareness campaign to raise the profile of IAQ in homes, schools and workplaces. He noted that while progress was being made in many areas of outside pollution the quality of indoor air continued to decline.

“We need to communicate some simple but powerful messages to the public about the impact of poor IAQ on health and its links to premature deaths,” said Taylor, who is also CEO of ARM Environments.

The meeting was also addressed by Rosamund Adoo Kissi-Debrah CBE, the leading air quality and child health campaigner, who recently received an apology from the government for the death of her daughter Ella which was linked to air pollution.

“The Government is concerned about the economy and money, so we need to focus on the cost of not cleaning up the air and the impact that will have on the NHS as more people get sick and die,” she told the BESA event. “Without cleaning up the air this miracle they think will happen with the NHS will not be possible.

“We have heard that the government does not think the public is concerned about air quality, even though every single one of us breathes air, every single minute of every day.” said Kissi-Debrah.

She explained that the water pollution campaigner Fergal Sharkey “had a similar push back and he was ignored for years. But it all changed when he started talking about sewage and gave the public the visible cue that they can see sewage in the water.”

“So, I think we need to change the language when talking about air quality and talk more powerfully about contamination, and its impact on people’s health,” said Kissi-Debrah. “Simple messages are key. We need to get the public to understand what toxic air is doing to their health, because the politicians will ignore this until it becomes a popular issue which will affect their ratings.”

Campaign

The group agreed to support BEAMA’s campaign to reform EPCs while also developing a powerful public awareness campaign that would provide the ammunition needed to put pressure on the government.

Engaging the younger generation was also seen as a crucial part of raising awareness and driving change, so the BESA event Included a demonstration of the ‘build a filter box’ challenge being used to enthuse school children about the principles of clean air in their classrooms and the engineering needed to deliver

it.

This is also part of the [BESA School Engagement and Engineering Discovery \(SEED\) Programme](#) which was developed with the schools engagement specialists [Built Environment Skills in Schools](#) (BESS).

Nathan Wood, who leads the [WV8 Day](#) working group, also updated the group on a major consultation to develop national occupational standards (NOS) for ventilation and IAQ. He said these would be essential to improve the quality of IAQ-related measures in buildings by creating a more skilled workforce able to design, install, commission, and maintain ventilation systems.

For more information about the wider programme of international events and ongoing plans for the #WorldVentil8Day initiative, which is held annually on November 8, visit the [World Ventilation Day](#) website.