

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 276 (2009)¹ Improving indoor air quality: a new challenge for local authorities

1. The threat from indoor pollution has been grossly underestimated by both public authorities and civil society. Policies, research and resources have mostly focused on atmospheric pollution even though numerous studies point out that indoor air is likely to be more than twice as polluted as outdoor air. This is all the more preoccupying as modern lifestyles mean that Europeans spend up to 90% of their lives indoors.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe asks public authorities at all levels of governance to meet their responsibilities to guarantee a healthy and sustainable environment for all. A new paradigm is required which defines clean air policies, taking into account total air exposure, both indoors and outdoors. Moreover, there is also a need for greater recognition of the links between policies on the environment, health, energy, transport, spatial planning and agriculture.

3. The Congress notes with satisfaction that many local authorities are already undertaking ambitious programmes to improve indoor air quality, which go beyond the scope of existing legislation. Such initiatives highlight the need for new regulations which would extend existing legislation on air pollution to include indoor pollution and which define quantifiable targets for all types of pollutants.

4. Any environmentally responsible policy must be developed in collaboration with all stakeholders. Air quality regulations can only be truly effective if they are understood and endorsed by both public authorities and by the people they are meant to protect.

5. Information on the extent and impact of the threat from indoor pollution is insufficient. This lack of reliable data makes it difficult for public authorities to properly assess the dangers and implement appropriate solutions. It also leaves citizens unsure of how best to protect themselves from risk. Local authorities are particularly well placed to protect the public and to make them more aware of the issues at stake, as well as more able to take informed decisions.

6. Creating a healthy indoor environment is beneficial as it leads to improved health and productivity. Furthermore, experience shows that taking strong and early action to regulate the use of indoor pollutants can, in the end, be less expensive than the harm caused through inaction.

7. The Congress calls for a strong commitment from international intergovernmental organisations in the fight against indoor pollution and the health risks it causes. In this regard,

it notes the lead taken by the World Health Organization (WHO) in recognising the significance of indoor pollution and welcomes its publication on *Guidelines for Indoor Air Quality: Dampness and Mould*.

8. It also welcomes the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1863 (2009) on environment and health: better prevention of environment-related hazards, in particular its focus on new emerging pathologies and on the need for early detection procedures, monitoring and prevention measures regarding indoor air quality.

9. It supports the Parliamentary Assembly's initiative to promote a sustainable and healthy environment and the recommendation to elaborate an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights which recognises the right to a healthy environment. The Congress commits itself to make an active contribution to the work which will be carried out in this respect.

10. The Congress invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to ask member states to:

a. extend their policies on atmospheric pollution to include indoor air and, in co-operation with territorial authorities and non-governmental organisations, draw up programmes on indoor air quality. These programmes could focus on regular monitoring of indoor air and new emerging risks; on setting up environmental indicators and health-based guidelines; and on the development of specific labelling of materials, particularly for construction, decorating and maintenance;

b. facilitate, in collaboration with local authorities, the provision of reliable and targeted information on indoor air quality thereby raising public awareness on the noxious effects of pollutants found in indoor spaces;

c. foster ambitious research and development programmes which encourage innovation and technological progress to develop safer and more ecological products, thereby making preventative approaches practicable at all levels of governance.

11. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe ask the European Commission to:

a. support local authority actions and pilot projects which address indoor pollution, and encourage an exchange of good practices and multidisciplinary research on this issue;

b. extend the scope of the REACH regulation concerning the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals, to ensure that they are all sufficiently regulated, regardless of their place of production.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 15 October 2009 and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2009, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPL(17)4, explanatory memorandum presented by P. Rondelli, San Marino (L,SOC), rapporteur).