

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 292 (2009)¹ Improving indoor air quality: a new challenge for local authorities

1. Until recently indoor air quality had not been considered a major health issue, unlike outdoor pollution which is subject to extensive regulation and attracts all media attention. However, recent public health scares relating to the indoor environment and a rapid rise in the number of people suffering from allergies and respiratory illnesses have alerted public authorities and public opinion to the fact that pollution levels in indoor air are often higher than those found in outdoor air.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that local authorities must pay more attention to the quality of indoor air, as Europeans spend almost 90% of their time in closed environments. The quality of indoor air varies according to the exposure to pollutants linked to buildings, materials, the external environment and occupants' behaviour. The consequences of poor quality indoor air are numerous and pose a problem for public health.

3. Citizens are demanding ambitious policies to protect their health and well-being. Their awareness of the global ecological challenges is growing; the threat of climate change, in particular, has focused people's attention on the need for urgent action. This state of mind has repercussions on the action they expect to see from public authorities with regard to indoor air quality.

4. Strong political will is required to protect citizens from the risks and to compensate for the gaps in legislation relating to air quality. A multidisciplinary approach is called for, which recognises the links between the quality of the environment and health. Local authorities should adopt a firm stance and create a new paradigm which tackles indoor pollution on a par with atmospheric pollution.

5. Local authorities are well placed to undertake exemplary integrated environmental health strategies which can serve as a model for citizens. They must ensure that all public indoor spaces under their authority, or private indoor spaces

such as social housing, are of the highest environmental quality. Taking early and preventative action makes economic sense as postponement entails more damage to health and to the environment.

6. Social cohesion and equity should be the driving forces behind public policies in this field as disadvantaged populations tend to be more exposed to a disproportionate number of environmental hazards.

7. Reliable information on indoor air pollutants would enable local authorities to decide on the best way to respond to this problem of indoor air and would help citizens to make properly informed choices. Indeed, civil society expects a radical shift in the direction taken by public authorities towards greater transparency and better access to information. Establishing health-based guideline values on different pollutants provides a concrete basis for action and for information to citizens on the negative effects of exposure to toxic substances present in indoor air.

8. The Congress invites the local and regional authorities of Council of Europe member states to:

a. implement integrated public policies on the environment and health with a view to improving the quality of indoor air in public buildings, based in particular on the monitoring and evaluation of pollution levels and new emerging risks;

b. introduce exemplary procedures to improve the quality of indoor air in public buildings, in particular through improved building design, construction and operation;

c. impose high environmental quality standards, including indoor air quality, in public procurement procedures;

d. raise public awareness concerning the extent of the impact of unhealthy indoor air, based upon reliable, scientifically based information and through local information centres which offer concrete and practical solutions to citizens;

e. promote training on indoor pollution for local authority staff and all people with responsibilities in the environmental, construction, health and education sectors.

9. The Congress instructs its Committee on Sustainable Development to intensify its work on the quality of the environment and on the issues at stake for public health.

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).