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Poor indoor climate for 80 million Europeans calls for political action

A new white paper from the German research institute Fraunhofer documents serious health problems related to damp and unhealthy indoor climate affecting 80 million Europeans. The VELUX Group believes this calls for political action at European level.

A new white paper from Fraunhofer, Institut für Bauphysik IBP, based on a study of scientific pre-reviewed literature, shows that some 80 million Europeans are living in damp and unhealthy buildings. Living in a damp and unhealthy home nearly doubles the risk of developing asthma and allergies.

What is more, we know that people in all age groups spend 90% of their time indoors.

"These findings are alarming as a much larger number of Europeans than expected are living in unhealthy environments. The number of unhealthy buildings poses a challenge to our health, productivity and learning across Europe and testifies that there is a need to get building renovation up to speed. This message becomes even more valid with the knowledge that pupils' learning ability can rise by up to 15% if the indoor climate is improved, to say nothing of our productivity and intellectual capacity at work," says Ulrich Bang, Director of Public Affairs and Sustainability in the VELUX Group.

The Fraunhofer white paper pinpoints key findings from a larger literature screening of the impact of European indoor environments on health and performance in homes and schools.

The main findings are as follows:

As a result of global discussions about climate changes and energy savings, today's building regulations focus mainly on energy efficiency in buildings. However, this increased attention to energy efficiency does not include any measures to ensure that our buildings are healthy and stimulate our bodies, minds and creativity.

Daylight has a huge effect on the human body and mind. A lack of daylight has negative effects on mental health, whereas exposure to a sufficient amount of daylight can help patient recovery and shorten time spent in hospital.

Lack of ventilation is closely linked to the problems of damp, indoor humidity and mould. If ventilation rate is too low, respiratory infections can occur.

"We regret that a sharpened focus on energy efficiency has not been combined with ensuring a healthy indoor climate, and we would urge that this dual challenge is addressed in future building performance directives. With the Energy Union just launched by the Commission, the time is ripe to ensure that energy efficiency and healthy buildings go hand in hand to ensure increased energy security and better health and well-being," says Ulrich Bang.

The VELUX Group's Model Home 2020 demonstration buildings prove that the knowhow and technology to create healthy and energy efficient buildings are already in place. The buildings of tomorrow can be built today, buildings that comply with the predicted EU building energy standards for 2020, without compromising on indoor comfort.

The next essential steps are incentives for homeowners to renovate their houses and public authorities to take action and kick-start renovation of schools, hospitals and public buildings.

The Fraunhofer white paper, "Towards an identification of European indoor environments' impact on health and performance", is available at www.velux.com/healthybuildings

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About the VELUX Group

For more than 70 years, the VELUX Group has created better living environments for people around the world. Making the most of daylight and fresh air through the roof. Our product programme includes roof windows and modular skylights as well as a range of decoration and sun screenings, roller shutters, installation solutions and intelligent home controls.

These products help to ensure a healthy and sustainable indoor climate. For work and learning. For play and pleasure. We work globally – with sales and manufacturing operations in more than 40 countries and around 10,000 employees worldwide. The VELUX Group is owned by VKR Holding A/S, a limited company wholly owned by foundations and family.

For more information, visit www.velux.com.

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