

Press Release

Afsset is proposing a labelling system for building materials and decorating products in order to improve the quality of indoor air

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Afsset is backing a labelling system for building materials and decoration products to describe their pollutant emissions. To this end, Afsset is today publishing a protocol to qualify emissions, and identify materials and products with "low emission" levels.

Afsset is targeting volatile organic compounds (hydrocarbons, alcohols, aldehydes, etc.) which are pollutants that contribute to a deterioration in the quality of indoor air. Afsset has therefore identified 165 main compounds which can be potentially emitted by building and decoration products and that can have an impact on health.

A labelling system of this nature is rendered even more important as no procedure currently exists allowing purchasers to identify materials with the lowest emissions, despite the fact that objectives relating to the quality of indoor air are far from being met: in 2006, the French Indoor Air Quality Observatory (OQAI), which is coordinated by the French Scientific and Technical Centre for Construction (CSTB), reported that a quarter of the French housing stock contained high concentrations of one or more pollutants. The use of low-emission materials compliant with this protocol should be recommended, especially in establishments for children such as day-care centres and schools.

Afsset's proposal fulfils the legal requirement for products "whose purpose or effect is to emit substances into the ambient air to be subject to a mandatory labelling system from the 1st of January 2012" (Article 40 of the "Grenelle 1" Law of 3 August 2009). This will allow France to come into line with Sweden, Germany and Japan, countries which have already adopted labelling protocols. In Japan, in five years this type of measure has led to a reduction in the number of homes exceeding the Japanese reference values for formaldehyde (from 30% to 1%).

The level required to satisfy the requirements of the Afsset protocol is high, although accessible, and the protocol can therefore be directly applied: on behalf of Afsset, the CSTB and the FCBA (French Technological Institute for Forestry, Cellulose, Construction Timber and Furniture) tested 34 building and decoration products and, depending on the categories, between one third and half of the products complied with the requirements. Afsset will further broaden the protocol at a later date and extend it to furnishing and consumer products (cleaning products, deodorants, incense, etc.).

Finally, Afsset has stated that the labelling system should reduce pollutants at their source, which is a matter of priority. To have an even greater impact on the quality of indoor air, however, the protocol must also form part of a series of constructive measures (ventilation and shutters) and changes in behaviour (homes should be aired everyday, even in winter).

Afsset's work was carried out at the request of the French ministries of ecology and health. It completes and replaces the first version of the protocol published in 2006.

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Definitions:

- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are organic compounds with a boiling point between (50 to 100 °C) and (240 to 260 °C) according to ISO 16000-6 standard.
- Building products are defined as intermediate products and are covered by Article 1 of French Decree no. 92-647 of 8 July 1992, that is all products manufactured for the purpose of long-term inclusion in construction work, which includes buildings and also civil engineering structures.
- Decoration products are defined as consumer goods not covered by Article 1 of French Decree no. 92-647 of 8 July 1992, that is products used to cover walls, flooring and ceilings. By way of example, the products include in particular wallpaper, paint and interior varnish.
- Solid materials: elastic and rigid products: insulation, plaster board, acoustic panels, floor/wall cladding
- Liquid materials: paint, varnish, oil, wax, filler, mortar, concrete, adhesive, sealant, putty
- Combined materials: combination of several solid or liquid products