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Incentive programme also benefits schools

Federal Environment Agency lends advice on how to avoid mistakes in school refurbishment job

Schoolchildren, teaching staff and parents are looking forward to the imminent refurbishment which will take place in their schools. Funds from the federal government incentive programme have been earmarked to improve the learning environment, in particular in older school buildings. The federal funds allotted for remediation, modernisation and refurbishment work will not only make schools more beautiful, they will also bring better ambient air. This depends though on the proper choice of building materials by public procurement offices, as unpleasant smells might otherwise be produced by higher emissions of volatile and semi-volatile organic substances. These substances can be the cause of lack of concentration and headaches.

The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) recommends following the advice offered in its *Leitfaden für die Innenraumhygiene in Schulgebäuden* [Guidebook on indoor air hygiene in school buildings] publication. The Indoor Air Hygiene Commission of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) has thoroughly revised the publication this year. The guidebook offers advice on how schools can do refurbishment work ecologically and with a view to health, whilst upgrading the buildings, too. It will make the job of guaranteeing good air quality long-term for those responsible - builders and school administration - a bit easier. It does require the work of professionals, however, also as concerns consideration of potential hazardous materials in existing building structure, as well as use of the appropriate materials and products.

The Blue Angel eco-label is a reliable signpost on building products that are harmless to health. The Blue Angel has been awarded to the following products: parquet, laminate and linoleum floorings, flexible floor covering, sealants for interior use, adhesive for floors, soundproofing and heat insulation materials, composite wood panels, wood chip wall covering, varnishes, and wall paints. Use of these products must be well-balanced, however, so that an adhesive and floor covering used together, for example, do not result in any reactive outgassing.

Using low-emissions products for refurbishment jobs is a key factor for healthy ambient air in classrooms, even though the purchase price of these product groups is initially somewhat more expensive. Downstream clean-up work to correct building defects results in higher costs, as experience at affected schools has shown.

If schoolchildren report headaches, tired eyes and lack of concentration after refurbishment is completed, this hinders successful learning and incurs costs at another point, namely to

restore health. Taking environmental criteria into consideration in the public tendering process has become entirely legitimate. Staff at public procurement offices and in municipalities, however, are often still unaware of the changes in the law.

The following UBA publications (in German) are available for free download and provide advice and guidance:

Leitfaden für die Innenraumhygiene in Schulgebäuden [Guidebook on indoor air hygiene in school buildings].

http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/mysql_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3689

The Blue Angel product signpost, *Umweltfreundlich bauen, Gesund wohnen [Green building, healthy living]*:

http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/mysql_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3824

The guide *Umweltfreundliche Beschaffung - Ökologische & wirtschaftliche Potenziale rechtlich zulässig nutzen [Green procurement - making legal use of ecological & economic potential]*:

http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/mysql_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3687

The *Schulen, besser Lernen in gesunder Luft [Schools: better learning in healthy air]* brochure:

http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/mysql_medien.php?anfrage=Kennummer&Suchwort=3837

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