

Combating Climate Change The RIBA's response to global warming

The RIBA's 'Combating Climate Change' programme will help our members, the Institute itself and its staff to play a part in tackling climate change, and to reduce negative impact on the environment. This briefing will set out what actions the RIBA already has underway, and what can be expected over the coming months.

Why climate change?

Climate change, brought about by man-made emissions of greenhouse gases, has been identified as the greatest challenge facing human society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Every individual, every industry and every profession will have a part to play in meeting the challenge.

RIBA members are centrally involved in a sector of the economy that is responsible for a very significant portion of the UK's emissions of carbon dioxide. As an employer and an organisation in its own right, the RIBA has a responsibility to reduce its own carbon footprint. And, as a professional institute with a part to play in society's intellectual and cultural life, we have a great opportunity to campaign for action.

Combating Climate Change – an overview

There are four strands that make up the RIBA's programme of work, as agreed by RIBA Council in December 2006. These are:

Setting targets - The RIBA believes that rapid and significant reductions in global carbon emissions are necessary to reduce climate change. The RIBA's Climate Change Policy adopts the philosophy of Contraction and Convergence. This involves emissions from industrialised nations reducing (contracting) and emissions from all nations converging to an overall target consistent with stabilising GHG concentrations in the atmosphere. Over time, emissions would contract and converge to an equal share per person. To achieve this equitable distribution, each of us in the UK would need to reduce our average annual carbon dioxide emissions from ten tonnes to two tonnes or less.¹

Providing the necessary tools – Architects are facing steadily tougher regulation about how energy efficient buildings must be, have ever-more environmentally aware and demanding clients, and themselves want to play their part through their work. Therefore we are providing member-focused guidance on the principles, tools and techniques necessary to design and build low carbon buildings, and to advise clients on what is possible. The first three publications will be publicly launched in October this year.

Changing our corporate behaviour - The RIBA itself causes significant carbon emissions - our activities create the need to travel, we heat and light our buildings, and each use a range of resources. We want to limit our own impact on the environment overall, and particularly to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions. Therefore we are carrying out an 'environmental audit', which will see how much

¹ Contraction and Convergence is the science-based, global climate-policy framework, proposed to the United Nations since 1990 by the Global Commons Institute. See www.gci.org.uk/ICE.pdf. It is supported by many climate change scientists and policy makers, including the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. See <http://www.rcep.org.uk/energy.htm>.

energy and resources the RIBA uses, what its carbon footprint is, where it comes from, and where we can take action to reduce it.

Campaigning - Through the RIBA Trust, Public Affairs, Communications, and also through other departments, the RIBA can help to promote greater public awareness of the climate change threat, the role buildings and design play in creating and reducing climate change, and join with other institutions to lobby the government and other organisations to raise their standards and play their part to combat climate change.

Providing tools for our members

The first part of the programme, the 'Climate Change Tools' project, will encourage and assist architects and others to understand the role that buildings play in climate change, and provide a guide to the principles, tools and techniques to build low carbon buildings.

The aim of the project is to encourage and assist members of the RIBA, as part of their leading role in the building industry, to play their part in combating climate change through the provision of 'low carbon' new buildings and building refurbishments. The term 'low carbon buildings' is understood to mean buildings in which the use of energy results in little or no emission of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases.

Launching the toolkit

We will launch the first stage of the project's output on 18 October this year, at the RIBA Small Practice Conference. This will include:

1) A Climate Change Briefing

This publication is accessible to a broad audience, and defines the nature of the problem. It sets out the range of energy uses and carbon dioxide emissions associated with new and existing UK buildings of different types, and identifies key factors that affect the level of carbon dioxide emissions. The briefing emphasises the critical role of the existing building stock, and include links to sources of energy and environmental benchmarking data.

2) A Guide to Low Carbon Design Tools

The guide covers performance simulation software for buildings of different types, post-construction performance testing, and performance monitoring and evaluation methods; and including references and links to more detailed guidance.

3) A Guide to Low-Carbon Performance Standards and Assessment Methods

Looking at both new and existing buildings, this guide covers energy and environmental standards for the main building types (residential, commercial and public), and includes references and links to more detailed guidance.

The second stage of the project, delivered later this year and into the beginning of 2008 will include:

4) A Carbon Literacy Briefing

5) A Guide to the Principles of Low Carbon Design and Refurbishment

6) A Guide to Low Carbon Skills and Training

To download the first three Climate Change Toolkits, visit www.architecture.com/climatechange

Changing the RIBA's corporate behaviour

The RIBA is also seeking to address its own environmental impact and reducing its carbon footprint. A working group has been set up, led by Martin Pascoe, to develop the various actions necessary to reduce our own carbon footprint. This includes several strands of work, two of these are described here – the **environmental audit**, and **engaging staff** in combating climate change.

Environmental audit of the RIBA

The environmental audit of the institute focuses on energy, procurement, transport and waste, and assesses our current environmental impact. The audit will enable us to identify the main activities that contribute towards our carbon footprint, and areas where we can make small changes that may have a big impact on our carbon dioxide emissions or our environmental impact.

The purpose of this audit is:

- To review the use of resources within the RIBA headquarters and satellite offices on Portland Place, providing recommendations on how this usage can be reduced or eliminated.
- To provide a document that can be used as a base point for action and for measurement and evaluation of progress through key performance indicators.
- To set an example of 'best practice' and highlight opportunities for other organisations, architectural firms and RIBA staff to contribute to reducing the impact of climate change on the environment.

Following the final results of the audit, we will then consider short and long term targets, and outline an action plan to achieve the targeted reductions to the RIBA's carbon emissions and waste. The preliminary results estimate annual carbon emissions of 715 tonnes of CO².

It is worth noting here that the 2001 replacement of the inefficient electric boilers with new gas powered versions has already reduced our carbon emissions by 424 tonnes of CO² annually.

Staff engagement

To help to engage staff, achieve the target reductions and to begin to embed best practice in the day-to-day activity of the RIBA, an all-staff educational event took place on 21 September. This in-house project was led by members of staff, and presented an opportunity for every member of staff to contribute, through examining their own ideas and behaviour.

Further information

For further details on any of the activities outlined above, please contact Ewan Willars in the PIR Department, on 020 7307 3741, or at ewan.willars@inst.riba.org