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All new buildings to be zero energy from 2019

All buildings built after 31 December 2018 will have to produce their own energy on-site, said the Industry Committee, amending the 2002 Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. MEPs also called for more public investments in energy-efficient buildings.

By 31 December 2018 at the latest EU Member States must ensure that all newly-constructed buildings produce as much energy as they consume on-site - e.g. via solar panels or heat pumps, says a report drawn up by Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PES, RO). The Commission proposal did not include any specific target dates for zero-energy buildings.

The Industry Committee also wants Member States to set intermediate national targets for existing buildings, i.e. to fix minimum percentages of buildings that should be zero energy by 2015 and by 2020 respectively.

MEPs define zero-energy buildings as buildings "where, as a result of the very high level of energy efficiency of the building, the overall annual primary energy consumption is equal to or less than the energy production from renewable energy sources on site". By the end of 2010, the Commission should establish a detailed common European definition of "net zero energy buildings", states the amended directive.

Step up financial support for improving energy efficiency of buildings

The committee added new provisions to the text which require Member States to draw up national action plans by 30 June 2011 setting out financial instruments for improving the energy efficiency of buildings, such as low-interest loans, fiscal rebates on income or property taxes or requiring energy suppliers to offer financial assistance to consumers.

Moreover, the Commission should by 30 June 2010 propose additional EU financial instruments such as:

- increasing the share of European Regional Development Fund money available for energy-efficiency measures to at least 15%,
- establishing, by 2014, an Energy Efficiency Fund financed by the Community budget, the European Investment Bank and Member States, to promote private and public investment in projects increasing the energy efficiency of buildings, and
- VAT reductions for goods and services related to energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Upgrade energy performance of existing buildings

Press release

A building's energy performance will have to be upgraded to meet at least minimum energy performance requirements whenever it undergoes major renovation or building components and technical building systems (such as windows, boilers or air conditioning systems) are replaced, says the amended text.

MEPs define a "major renovation" as a refurbishment of more than 25% of the building's surface or where the total costs of the renovation are higher than 20% of the building's value.

The minimum energy performance requirements are to be set by the Member States, says the directive. However, the Commission will have to establish a common methodology for calculating the energy performance of buildings by 31 March 2010, add MEPs.

Holiday homes must meet minimum energy performance standards, too

Member States should set minimum energy performance standards for holiday homes used less than four months a year, too, say MEPs, deleting a proposed exemption for such houses.

However, the following are excluded from the directive's energy efficiency requirements: small houses (with a floor area of less than 50m²), buildings for religious activities, temporary buildings used for less than 18 months, workshops and agricultural buildings with low energy demand and protected historic buildings where an energy-efficiency measure would "unacceptably alter their character".

Smart meters

The committee wants "smart" meters to be installed in all new buildings and all buildings undergoing a major renovation. Smart meters measure both how much and at what time of day energy is consumed - a system which could, for example, allow customers to benefit from lower night-time tariffs.

N.B. :

The report was adopted in committee with 36 votes in favour, 11 against and three abstentions. -- Rapporteur: Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PES, RO) -- Procedure: co-decision -- First-reading vote in plenary: 4-7 May 2009

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