

This is an English translation of the following article:

Mitteilungen des Umweltbundesamtes. Aktualisierung zu: Leitfaden zur Vorbeugung, Erfassung und Sanierung von Schimmelbefall in Gebäuden (2017) - Kapitel 6.1 „Nutzungsklassen“.

Bundesgesundheitsbl 01 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00103-023-03814-0>

## **Announcement of the German Environment Agency**

### **Amendments to the “Guideline on the prevention, detection and remediation of mould in buildings” (2017) – chapter 6.1 „Utilisation classes”**

#### **Abstract**

The guidelines published by the German Environment Agency in 2017 on the “Prevention, detection and remediation of mould in buildings” were clarified in two points. First, Chapter 6.1 “Utilisation classes” now includes the definition of an “indoor space” in relation to human use. Second, the previous utilisation class IV - which concerned cavities and building components – was removed. These changes avoid misinterpretations and emphasise the hygiene-preventive approach of the guideline.

#### **Background**

The guidelines published in 2017 for the prevention, detection and remediation of mould infestation in buildings [1], in short, the “Mould Guidelines”, were issued by the Commission for Indoor Air Hygiene (IRK) at the German Environment Agency (UBA) and replaced former recommendations from 2002 and 2005. For over 20 years, these guidelines have served as a uniform nationwide basis and gave users orientation for the reduction of health risks indoors due to mould infestation in buildings. The recommendations of the Mould Guidelines form a hygienic and preventive approach to improving indoor air quality. The German Environment Agency can look back on a large number of positive responses since their publication.

The 2017 Mould Guidelines introduced, for the first time, the concept of room utilisation classes. The intention behind this classification of indoor spaces was to improve the assessment of the actual exposure to mould of people in indoor spaces. The health risk due to exposure increases with the amount of time spent in rooms affected by mould infestation or in rooms that are in contact with these areas. On the other hand, the exposure and health risk in rooms that are rarely used or only for short periods of time is considered to be lower. Here, the urgency of remediation measures and the type and scope of remediation can be downgraded if necessary. The introduction of the utilisation classes thus made it possible to classify indoor spaces depending on the type and frequency of use.

#### **Amendments**

Recently, the German Environment Agency has received an increasing number of enquiries regarding Chapter 6.1 entitled “Utilisation classes” (for indoor spaces). This part was integrated in the Mould Guidelines for the first time in 2017. These enquiries focused primarily on the definition of indoor spaces in the context of the Mould Guidelines and, in particular, on questions relating to the room utilisation class IV.

Therefore, a clarifying definition of the utilisation of indoor spaces by people was added to this chapter: “For the purposes of this recommendation, a “room” is generally a self-contained part of a building formed by the floor, ceiling and walls. The recommendations extend to all building structures and areas adjacent to a room, including any cavities that are either permanently or temporarily in contact with the indoor air or from which diffusion of hazardous substances into the room cannot be ruled out.”

Furthermore, the room utilisation class IV was deleted because, unlike classes I-III, utilisation class IV of an interior room cannot be assessed by people in most cases, but relates to cavities (hollow spaces) and building components. Building components and cavities must clearly be assigned to the adjacent rooms of the corresponding room utilisation class as emissions from these spaces might affect the indoor air quality.

## Conclusions

A definition of the term (interior) “room” in the context of the Mould Guidelines and the deletion of utilisation class IV, which was applied mainly for building structures or certain components of a room, will make the hygiene and prevention approach of the guideline clearer and unambiguous. The amendment was necessary to prevent possible misinterpretations of the room utilisation classes. The changes will apply from January, 1st, 2024. The updated guideline will be available on the UBA homepage from 2024 [1].

## Notes

Correspondence may be addressed to: German Environment Agency, Section II 1.4 “Microbiological Risks”, Wörlitzer Platz 1, 06844 Dessau-Roßlau, Germany.

## References

[1] Federal Environment Agency und Commission for Indoor Air Hygiene (2019) Guideline on the prevention, detection and remediation of mould in buildings (originally in German, „*Leitfaden zur Vorbeugung, Erfassung und Sanierung von Schimmelfall in Gebäuden*“), Umweltbundesamt, Dessau-Rosslau, German version from November 2017, English version from November 2019. 192 p. Download: <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/publikationen/guideline-mould>