

Press Release No. 41/2009

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Joint press release with the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

Environmental health in indoor spaces

Conference hosted by Federal Ministry for Environment and Federal Environment Agency in Berlin

Mr Michael Müller, Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, opened a conference on air quality in indoor spaces in Berlin today, saying, "Environmental protection means preventative healthcare. We must become active in all areas where environmental factors may have adverse impact on health. Since we spend around 80 to 90 percent of our time indoors, concern for indoor air quality is key in the prevention of environmental pollution that affects health," said Mr Müller. The conference is co-hosted by the Federal Ministry for Environment and Federal Environment Agency on 23-24 June and intends to spotlight the current problems in indoor spaces, how to assess the health aspects, and which options for political action might result.

Whether it is in the home, at school, at the office or in transit- Germany's population spends the great majority of its time indoors, where it is exposed to a number of pollution sources: chemical substances such as solvents or plasticisers, particulate matter, or microorganisms like bacteria and mildew. Some of the indoor pollutants that used to be problematic have been banned, thanks to policy efforts and systematic action to remove materials such as the wood preservative pentachlorophenol, chlorinated solvents such as perchloroethylene, and asbestos, from the market.

However, they have been replaced by other new substances. There are currently more than 200 volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds in indoor air. Indoor air concentrations vary depending on the materials present, which range from building materials and furniture and equipment stock to applied cleaning agents. The level of pollution also depends on user behaviour as well as building structure and location. Four expert forums at the conference will focus on the topics of: energy saving and good indoor air quality; emissions from building products; emissions from laser printers and copiers; and the rise in the occurrence of fragrances in indoor space, which is problematic to health.

Dessau-Roßlau, 23 June 2009