

Combating Climate Change

The RIBA's response to global warming

Combating Climate Change – an overview

There are four strands that make up the RIBA's programme of work. 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, a way of understanding the role each one of us plays in reducing CO₂ emissions. The theory points towards even tougher reduction targets than the UK Government has currently set itself.

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 on 18 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 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 is helping 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 are launching 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

Changing the RIBA's corporate behaviour

The RIBA is also seeking to address its own environmental impact and reducing its carbon footprint.

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.