

Flooring and its Impact on Health and the Environment

Report on Local Authority Questionnaire, 13/9/00

No. of questionnaires sent = 147

No. of replies = 51

No. of completed questionnaires = 45

Name of Council	1. Policy to reduce allergens? *	2. Policy on type of flooring?	3. Would consider a policy?	4. Aware that carpets harbour allergens?	5. Aware that PVC can be threat to env/ health?	6. Aware of health complaints due to flooring?
North Ayrshire Council	No written policy but exposure is reduced by those who are aware of the problem.	No written policy but exposure is reduced by those who are aware of the problem.	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Some individuals are aware of the risks.	Some individuals are.	Only those associated with sick building syndrome.
Bexley Council	a) No b) n/a c) No	a) No b) n/a c) no	a) Possibly b) n/a c) Possibly	Our health and safety section has not advised us.	As above	No.
Bradford City Metro. Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	Yes	Yes	Occasional complaints from workers.
Carmarthenshire County Council	a) No b) No c) No	Easily cleanable non-slip in identified areas.	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Personally never related what allergens are present at home (and highlighted by media) to the workplace.	No	No complaints received.
Cardiff County Council	a) No b) No c) No Unless you include a no smoking policy Authority wide.	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	Yes	No	No
Cheshire County Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Solvent adhesives and dust).

Cornwall County Council	a) NO b) No c) No	a) NO b) Yes c) No	a) NO/ YES b) yes c) yes	YES	NO	NO
Derby -shire County Council	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	-	The Authority is aware of the arguments and there are conflicting expert reports on the risk of allergies from carpet flooring, the debate looks to continue for some time to come. (enclosed an article from Contract Flooring on health scares over carpets).	The Authority is aware of the arguments.	-
Durham Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	a) Yes b) - c) Yes	No	-	-
Dumfries and Galloway	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	No	No	No
Essex County Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	a) Possibly b) Possibly c) Possibly	Yes	Yes	Don't know
Falkirk Council	a) None currently b) None currently c) None currently	a) None found. b) Dependent on activity - carpets for teaching areas, vinyl for non-teaching areas. c) Non formal - depends on use activity. Safety issues.	a) Possibly/yes b) Possibly/yes c) Possibly/yes	Aware of growing evidence to support this.	No.	We have received no complaints associated with the fitting of new carpets.
Hertford -shire County Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes, but material specific ie. no asbestos, Timber from managed forests. b) as above c) as above	a) A new materials policy is under development. b) With delegation of funds it would be	Yes, but so many other materials in general use, there needs to be consideration of risks involved	We are currently researching the use of PVC - there is conflicting evidence on its environmental impact.	I know of only one serious complaint which related to the adhesive used in carpet laying.

			difficult to impose unless it was reinforced by legislation			
Isle of Anglesey County Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Isle of Wight Council	No - in all cases daily cleaning regimes are in place which include vacuuming of carpets where fitted.	No fixed policy but high traffic resistant carpets such as 'flotex' are a standard specification.	There is no apparent need.	We have no reports or evidence to suggest a link between carpeted areas and an increase in allergies. If it is the case then (3) above would apply.	Yes - our developing sustainable construction policy will explore in more detail.	No.
Kent County Council	None of which I am aware, other than compliance with COSHH.	Not related to exposure to allergens, other than compliance with DfEE standards.	A question for senior officers and members of the County Council. I am not in a position to comment.	As an Authority yes, but at this point it has not been highlighted as a significant risk.	Not as far as I am aware, other than in global terms.	The initial 'new' smell of glues can cause problems. Otherwise not as far as I am aware. The County's Health & safety Advisor may have more information.
London Borough of Hackney	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Individual offices have the knowledge	-	-
London Borough of Harrow	a) No b) No c) No	Only in terms of sustainability	a) Possibly b) Possibly c) Possibly	We are now	Yes	No
London Borough of Havering	a) No b) No c) No	d) No e) No f) No	If evidence was provided then our authority would consider developing a policy.	-	-	-

London Borough of Red-bridge	a) NO b) No c) No	NO policy in place. Depends on what the client wants and can afford	-	NO	NO, but aware that exposure to PVC dust can cause respiratory problems	NO
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	Principally restricted to air handling/air conditioning systems and areas attracting condensation.	Principally carpeting or PVC/vinyl, the choice seems to be dependant on the appropriate British Standard and the anticipated usage.	Should a demand be identified then all agreed that some form of policy should be instituted.	Yes	Yes, in certain conditions	Name received (?)
London Borough of Wands-worth	Yes. The Council has measures in place (under Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regul. 1999 (COSHH) to reduce to as low as is reasonably practicable and, in any event, below any occupational exposure standards, the exposure of persons who might be affected by exposure to allergens as a result of the Council's undertaking.	Yes, the policy on the type of flooring selected is to choose the most appropriate least-hazardous product, giving due consideration to such things as cost effectiveness, user requirement and the environment in which the product will be used.	See question 2. The policies referred to in that answer are kept under regular review.	Yes. The Council is aware that many environments, including those with fitted carpets, can harbour allergens and pose a risk to allergy sufferers. An assessment carried out under COSHH identifies actions the Council needs to take to minimise exposure to allergens. If an employee has been diagnosed by a medical practitioner as suffering from an allergy, the Council would take any additional precautions recommended by its Occupational Health Physician to minimise adverse effects on that employee's health.	The Council complies with legal duties under both health and safety and environmental legislation. The Council also observes the advice of several Government Departments. Therefore, in terms of the way the Council uses PVC, it has measures in place to either prevent or, where legislation permits, minimise any harm to the environment and to human health.	The Council has a complaints procedure for the use of employees, contractors, members of the public and service users. Also, it has an incident reporting procedure whereby any incidents that have occurred, which are connected with the Council's undertaking, can be reported to the Council's H&S professionals. No health complaints have been reported in connection with either allergens and carpets or PVC.

Middlesborough Borough Council	a) No b) No c) No	Within Building Regulations, fire Regulations and budgetary constraints	Would consider	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monmouthshire Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) Yes c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes	No	No
Norfolk County Council	a) No b) Schools decide individually on policy c) No	a) in part b) No - schools decide c) No	b) Unlikely - left to individual schools c) No	Yes	-	-
Norwich City Council	a) & b) N/A c) Yes - when floor coverings are replaced, impervious carpet specified to meet NHS standard	a) & b) N/A c) Yes - currently specify grades Genus, Volnay and Montana carpet.	N/A	Yes	Yes	No
Nottingham City Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	a) Possibly b) Possibly c) Possibly	Somebody might	No	No
Nottinghamshire County Council.	Currently being assessed as part of Development of Green Design Guide. c) No	No written policy, however floor types have developed in use through experience. Head teachers also have input as other building users. c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes	This statement needs to be more specific.	no
Orkney Islands Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Renfrewshire Council	There is no policy regarding this matter.	There is a type specification regarding quality and durability of floor finishes. Compliance with Building Control and EEC regulations.	The Authority would consider all aspects regarding this topic before committing all services to a fixed	We are aware and the cleaning regime executed by Environmental Services reflects this.	No evidence brought forward to my knowledge.	No.

			specification.			
Shrewsbury Council	The Authority has a general health and safety policy aimed at all these areas. Part of the policy is to promote well being and a healthy environment in all the Authority's buildings.	Only in so much that health and safety is complied with, that the flooring is fit for the purpose, complies with best value cost in use criteria and provides value for money. Schools continue to prefer carpet for a number of reasons particularly sound deadening.	-	Yes, but central departments can only advise clients and users. There will continue to be value judgements made by individuals and groups.		
Stirling Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	We have become aware	Review	Yes
North Tyneside Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) Fibre bonded carpet sheet, vinyl/tile vinyl c) as above	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Winchester Council	a) a b) n/a c) no	a) no b) n/a c) no	a) Yes b) n/a c) Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Worcestershire County Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) No b) No c) No	Possibly, but depends on scientific data, sustainability issues etc. With delegation of budgets would be difficult.	Some awareness but depends on other factors such as heating systems, fan convectors, cleaning, servicing etc.	Yes, but economic and sustainability also factors	None known.
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	a) None b) None c) None	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) difficult due to current funding delegated to schools by the government	Yes	Yes	None at present.

			iii c) Yes			
North York-shire County Council	a) No b) No c) No	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	a) Yes b) Yes c) Yes	Yes but no complaints have ever been received to the best of my knowledge.	Yes	None

Replies from Local Authorities that didn't complete the questionnaire and additional comments:

North Lanarkshire Council: Forwarded letter to Council's Health and Safety Officer - Council has no specific policies relating to allergens from types of flooring mentioned in the letter. All flooring is fitted in accordance with British Standards.

Powys Property Development and business support group: No specific policy but all accommodation satisfies current Health and Safety requirements

Sheffield City Council: Regret that they will not be returning questionnaire but they don't have policy referred to in question 2.

Gloucestershire County Council: Most re-flooring work controlled through budgets - minimal influence of purchasing decisions - interested in research. Would be happy to have regard for identifying health risks in the specifications for new buildings.

London Borough of Lambeth: Letter referred to Head of Regulatory Services.

Worcestershire County Council: Would be interested in the results of the survey

Cambridgeshire County Council: Won't be returning the questionnaire.

Leicestershire County Council: Does specify floor finishes in new buildings but often at various clients request including individual schools. As individual establishments are responsible for the revenue costs of replacing floor finishes their requests are honoured. The dept. would dissuade clients from certain materials if there existed conclusive evidence that they constitute a health hazard. Where choice is left to the designer then specifications would favour natural or non-formaldehyde products.

Nottingham City Council: Didn't answer q. 7 except to say 'too many buildings to give a specific answer.

LB of Tower Hamlets: Letter states: The council has spent a great deal of time and money on sites which showed evidence of 'sick building syndrome' but most of this seems to have been connected with climatic conditions and air circulation. No policies in schools except a decision not to carpet any teaching areas - carpets are restricted to staff rooms and offices. This decision due to ease of maintenance rather than allergic considerations. Everyone I (Facilities Management project officer) spoke to did appear to realise that carpeting can, if not maintained properly, pose a hazard to allergy sufferers and should there be any evidence of this to actively develop policies to counteract it.

Derby City Council: Their policies do not specifically cover allergens in flooring. Passed report onto Chief Environmental Health Officer - he will consider whether he needs to develop more specific advice on flooring in their buildings.

City and County of Swansea: Letter and questionnaire passed to the Head of Estates.

Exeter Council: Letter and Questionnaire passed to appropriate person for completion.

London Borough of Greenwich: Letter and questionnaire referred to Head of Central Occupational Health and Safety.

* Questions in full are:

1. Does your authority have a current policy to reduce exposure to allergens in a) public places, b) schools and c) workplaces?
2. Does your authority have a current policy on the type of flooring used in: a) public buildings, b) schools and c) workplaces?
3. Would your authority consider developing such policies for: a) public buildings, b) schools and c) workplaces?

4. Is your authority aware that fitted carpets can harbour allergens and pose a risk to allergy sufferers?
5. Is your authority aware that PVC (in flooring and other products) can pose an environmental and human health hazard?
6. Is your authority aware of any health complaints due to fitting of new carpets, or refurbishment or occupation of new buildings, either from the general public or from workers?
7. What are the types of flooring most commonly specified by your authority for use in public buildings, schools or workplaces under the authority's jurisdiction? Would you specify
 - a) wooden flooring
 - b) laminate flooring
 - c) natural linoleum
 - d) cork
 - e) PVC (or vinyl)
 - f) halogen free plastic
 - g) fitted carpet
 - h) other

See separate sheet for replies to question 7.