

# CLASSIFIED

PROPERTY P6 | SITUATIONS VACANT P42 | VEHICLES P36 | FOR SALE P42 | TUITION P43 | MISCELLANEOUS P43 | PETS P44

## Towards energy performance buildings

**ANGELO XUEREB**, president of the Federation of Building Contractors, says there are many ways to reach energy efficiency involving both the use of alternative clean energy and the reduction of energy use.

Energy performance in buildings is a key issue in achieving Malta's and the EU's climate and energy objectives. Buildings are responsible for 40 per cent of EU energy consumption and 36 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Improving energy performance of buildings is a cost-effective way of fighting climate change and improving energy security, while also creating jobs. The issue is deemed crucial in Europe, so much so that the EU has issued a directive aimed at achieving 'zero energy buildings'.

The Energy Performance Building Directive (EPBD) forces member states to apply minimum requirements to energy performance of new and existing buildings, ensures the certification of their energy performance and requires regular inspection of boilers and air-conditioning systems.

Our country still does not have a clear, feasible action plan as to how to maximise on energy performance in buildings. Therefore, we neither have adequate incentives nor the whip to encourage people to adapt to better insulation within buildings.

Malta relies almost exclusively on fossil fuels for energy, and while the increase in electricity bills has become a hot issue at a national level, there still seems to be no solution other than educating the energy user to consume less. Since the building sector happens to be the major energy consumer, the implementation of the EPBD directive gains even more significance in Malta.

Irrespective of whether the target is 100 per cent or 80 per cent reduction, achieving zero energy buildings is still a major task. This is why the EU is offering incentives

such as the 'Zero Energy Building' award scheme. We must take action fast.

Up till a few years ago, most local buildings were constructed in natural solid stone blocks, which retain high humidity and absorb the heat during the day, releasing it internally at night.

Stone is now being replaced by hollow concrete blocks, resulting in most local buildings being very warm in summer and very cold in winter, thus leading to higher demand for air-conditioning and higher electricity consumption by an average of 3.5 per cent each year.

**"While the increase in electricity bills has become a hot issue, there still seems to be no solution other than educating the energy user to consume less"**

This high increase calls for an urgent action plan to reduce its use, with measure to ensure all our buildings are certified for energy performance. All buildings must have the minimum threshold of insulation, with insulation across all external walls, all apertures having double or triple glazing, thermal breakers for all aluminium sections, and insulations for floors.

The onus of this, of course, lies with developers and architects.



However, it should also be one of government's prerogatives to achieve, through incentives, energy efficiency in buildings.

Architects should act as advisers to clients on energy efficiency aspects and not just on planning issues. They should explain that the initial slight increase in the cost of energy performance buildings would be offset in the long term by saving on electricity costs.

Having an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) as a requirement would indirectly contribute

to eliminating the hundreds of unsightly unfinished buildings jarring our streetscape.

To reduce the risk of unfair competition, we need to establish a privately owned entity of asset valuers: a group of professionals who would assess the various aspects of the building and then issue a technical and professional report on the property - a process leading to a more accurate property valuation.

Regulations on this matter in Malta have been discussed for the past 10 years. Government should lead by example and adopt the

proposed building regulations in all new buildings.

We all talk about energy efficiency or clean energy and reducing consumption, but are we individually doing our best to contribute our share? To achieve an effective result, we must all contribute - from politicians to government officials, down to developers, architects, engineers, industries, households and individuals.

*Mr Xuereb submitted these proposals while addressing the International Symposium on the 'EU sustainable energy campaign'.*