

Sustainable Construction: The “Bâtiment-Energie” Foundation

Four leading players in the French building and energy sectors have decided to support research into ways of halting climate change. Lafarge, Arcelor, EDF and Gaz de France have joined forces to form the “Fondation Bâtiment-Energie” (the Building and Energy Foundation), recognized by the French government as a public interest organization.

The Foundation’s purpose is to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The target that it has set is a fourfold reduction in greenhouse gases by the year 2050. The methods for doing this are clearly defined:

- reduction in energy consumption,
- greater recourse to renewable energy in the construction sector,
- promotion of innovative or breakthrough technology.

The Foundation is focusing on the construction sector and is targeting both new build projects and redevelopment of existing structures. It is worth noting that in France, energy consumption of buildings represents 46% of total energy consumption and accounts for 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions.

To achieve its aim, the Foundation has made a commitment to support research initiatives considered to be in the public interest carried out by either public- or private-sector laboratories. This commitment, which will last for at least five years, takes the following form:

- organization, approximately once a year, of calls for public- or private-sector R&D projects,
- selection of projects by a jury,
- financing of the evaluation of the selected research studies or projects,
- publication of the results of the research and exploitation of the studies – the Foundation will not retain for itself intellectual property rights of the results of research,
- cooperation with other players, both public and private, whether in a domestic French or European framework, who are interested in the aims of the Foundation – in order to share tasks and optimize financial and human resources.

For example, in 2005 the call for bids was for projects involving renovation and improvement of energy performance of existing private houses.

The latest call for projects concerns improving the energy performance of office buildings in both new build and renovation projects. In October 2006, seven projects were shortlisted. A panel consisting of eight experts from different backgrounds, made a selection from among the 15 projects submitted. The seven shortlisted projects offered a range of technical solutions making it possible to construct high energy-efficient buildings or

to offer low-energy consumption renovations of existing buildings. They also provide decision-making tools to help choose the most pertinent solutions.

The seven teams selected will receive a financial subsidy for them to take their projects further before the final selection and the allocation of grants, which will take place early in January 2007. Later that month, the winners will be asked to present their projects to the press and the Foundation will launch its third call for projects.

The Foundation and Research

The action of the foundation is in line with that of other publicly-supported research programs such as PREBAT (the program for research into energy in the building industry).

It was one of the first such foundations to be created in France, sponsored by the French Ministry of Research, the ADEME (the French agency for environment and energy management) and the CSTB (the French construction industry scientific and technical center).