

Benefits and incentives for passive houses abroad

While incentives for passive houses in Spain are still being defined, several European countries and some US states have spent years placing the Passivhaus standard at the centre of their public building policy.

This article completes the overview of incentives for passive house construction in Spain and turns its attention beyond our borders. The aim is to show how other countries and municipalities support sustainable building in its various forms, whether passive houses, Passivhaus projects, bioclimatic construction, NZEB buildings or LEED certifications. The international picture offers a useful reference for understanding where energy regulation for buildings is heading.

Germany, the epicentre of Passivhaus construction and certification

Germany remains the benchmark country in this field. Six of its Länder have approved measures that establish the Passivhaus standard as the reference for both retrofits and new public buildings. In each case with a different scope, the passive house standard has become the chosen tool for meeting CO2 reduction targets. In Hamburg, moreover, passive houses will be the only ones able to access public financing.

The Länder are not the only institutions to have taken a position on sustainable building. Municipalities, which control most building permits, have also joined the support for passive house construction. In Wettbergen, near Hannover, three hundred terraced and single-family homes have been built to the Passivhaus standard. In the district of Darmstadt-Dieburg, building guidelines have been approved specifying that all new buildings must be designed and built to the passive house standard.

The city of Freiburg determined in July 2008 that, from 2009, all buildings had to meet the KfW40 standard, and that from 2011 the Passivhaus standard would be mandatory. Cologne and Nuremberg have followed a similar path. In many other municipalities, a commitment has been adopted to build all public works to the passive house standard.

Austria, also a pioneer

In the city of Wels, the so-called passive house declaration was signed in 2008, an agreement guaranteeing that all new construction and renovation projects must be carried out to the Passivhaus standard.

The state of Lower Austria and several municipalities in the state of Vorarlberg committed in 2007 to building all public construction and renovation to the passive house standard.

Belgium, a European example

In Brussels, following the European directives requiring that from 2020 all buildings be NZEB, nearly zero-energy buildings, all new construction is required to follow the passive house standard. The province of Antwerp joined the construction of efficient public buildings in 2013.

Luxembourg, a clear and simple example

In Luxembourg, from 2017 all new buildings must be constructed to the passive house standard.

Norway

In Oslo, all public buildings must be constructed to the passive house standard.

The United States, energy efficiency across the ocean

In the United States, Passivhaus certification also enjoys the support of various public institutions. In the city of San Francisco, passive houses have been included in the fast-track permit approval plan. At the end of 2014, New York approved the report to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from buildings across the city by 2050, a document in which the Passivhaus standard is the only standard mentioned.

A reference for the Spanish context

This international overview shows that the Passivhaus standard has ceased to be a voluntary option and has become, in many territories, the basis of public building regulation. At PAPIK Group we build houses to this same standard with our Eskimohaus system, and we closely follow the evolution of incentives for sustainable construction and energy retrofit so that every project can make the most of the available framework of incentives.

The information gathered in this article is based on documentation published by the international Passivhaus Institute.

Europe's trajectory makes it clear that the passive house is not a passing trend, but the criterion on which public authorities are rebuilding the way they understand public construction.