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New DGNB ‘Climate Positive’ award for buildings that make an active contribution to climate protection

As many studies highlight, the property industry plays a pivotal role in achieving climate protection goals. What they often fail to mention is that there are already a number of buildings that actively contribute to these goals. This was the motivation behind the Climate Positive award recently launched by the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB). To receive the award, the carbon emissions generated when using and operating a building must still be lower than the volume of carbon emissions the building avoids in the first place by producing and exporting energy with zero greenhouse emissions. The DGNB honoured the first eleven projects that demonstrate that this is already possible at the Expo Real trade fair in Munich.

“The aim of the new DGNB award is to honour buildings that make a positive contribution to achieving climate protection goals,” says Dr Christine Lemaitre, DGNB CEO. The DGNB considers a building to be ‘climate-positive’ if using or running the building results in a balanced – or ideally negative – annual carbon footprint, thus making an important contribution to climate protection.

To evaluate net values, the DGNB examines the absolute greenhouse gas emissions of a building in use, looking specifically at values for a period of one year. On one side of the equation, an assessment is made of carbon emissions generated when energy is delivered to the building and consumed. For example, the DGNB specifically examines electricity consumption. Any carbon emissions that are avoided by a building – by exporting energy it generates itself – are then subtracted from this value.
Buildings that use more green electricity, biogas or urban district are at an advantage when calculating net carbon footprints because such energy approaches have a much smaller carbon footprint than conventional energy. “It’s not enough to buy in renewable energy, however, and we don’t consider trading of carbon offset certificates,” says Lemaitre. “There are three key elements to being climate-positive in the DGNB sense: first, high energy efficiency through smart building design, which is about making meaningful use of building technology and people knowing what they’re doing; second, it’s about using renewable energy; and third, it’s about feeding self-produced energy back into the grid.”

**First buildings honoured by the DGNB at Expo Real 2019**

The DGNB announced the first projects to receive an award on October 8 at Expo Real, the property and investment trade fair in Munich. The award-winners include two detached houses in Freising and Mühltal as well as a block of flats in Frankfurt called the Aktiv-Stadthaus. Two developments spearheaded by Elobau received an award: a logistics centre in Leutkirch and a commercial property in Probstzella encompassing a production hall and offices. Some of the first awards for climate-positive buildings also went to the Langes Haus event building in Bad Heilbrunn and a Volksbank branch in Kirchheimbolanden. Two former winners of the annual DGNB Award for Sustainable Building were also honoured: Freiburg City Hall and Schmuttertal Grammar School in Diedorf. An educational establishment also became the first development outside Germany to gain the award: the School of Design and Environment in Singapore. Another award-winner is the Eisbärhaus in Kirchheim unter Teck. Erected in 2009, the Eisbärhaus encompasses a residential block and business premises. As well as bestowing the Climate Positive award, the DGNB also honoured the building with a platinum certificate based on the latest version of the DGNB System for ‘Buildings in Use’.

Further information on all projects and developments that have received the award is available at [www.dgnb.de/climatepositive](http://www.dgnb.de/climatepositive). This website also provides more detail on concepts, measures and technologies that promote the climate-positive use of buildings.

**The Climate Positive Award is valid for one year**

The new DGNB award is valid for one year. To continue calling a building ‘climate-positive’, property owners must present an ecological balance sheet for each following year. “Energy consumption and the amount of energy a building produces itself are not a fixed entity; they’re subject to fluctuation,” explains Lemaitre. “So being climate-positive isn’t a building feature – it depends how it’s used or operated. As a result, it’s imperative and it only makes sense that a building is regularly assessed and re-evaluated.”

The contribution a building makes to climate protection is important, but it’s not the only pertinent factor when it comes to sustainable building. As a result, in future the DGNB will link the Climate Positive award to certification for buildings in use. The minimum prerequisite will be a silver certificate. “It’s important to look at the many different aspects of sustainability from a holistic angle, including how a building is operated,” says Lemaitre. “Our certification system for buildings in use provides a suitable management tool for this. For example, it helps you define a property strategy that will enable you to systematically enhance economic viability and user satisfaction.”
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About DGNB German Sustainable Building Council
The DGNB German Sustainable Building Council was founded in 2007 and has around 1200 members, making it Europe’s biggest network for sustainable building. The aim of the DGNB is to promote sustainability in the construction and real estate industry and instil awareness of building sustainability among the broader population. The DGNB is an independent non-profit organisation. Its certification system offers a planning and optimisation tool for evaluating sustainable buildings and urban districts. It was developed to help organisations enhance the tangible sustainability of construction projects. The DGNB system is based on the concept of holistic sustainability, placing equal emphasis on the environment, people and commercial viability. The DGNB Academy is an education and training platform that has already provided more than 3500 people from nearly 40 countries with official qualifications in sustainable building.