

In the current enthusiasm for **wellbeing architecture**, retrofit projects increasingly promise improvements to health through design choices. Yet, as an architectural technologist with over a decade experience in upgrading Edinburgh's tenements and pre-war housing, I've grown wary of claims that sound more like marketing than fact. Some retrofit teams – eager to impress or to secure funding – may overstate the health benefits of their work, weaving miracle claims that outpace what evidence-based design can actually deliver.

This post aims to help homeowners, landlords, and even fellow professionals discern when *wellbeing claims* cross the line from robust, evidence-led design into hype. I will cover key themes such as ventilation and indoor air quality, how UK and Scottish building regulations frame health-related standards, and why you should always question claims around moisture control, airtightness, and invisible “wellbeing boosts.” Along the way, I'll mention tools and resources that empower you to ask better questions and avoid disappointment.

Why Focus on Ventilation and Indoor Air Quality?

Among all the environmental factors affecting health inside buildings, **ventilation and indoor air quality (IAQ)** hold a special regulatory and health status. Unlike many softer factors linked to wellbeing – such as lighting, materials, and acoustic comfort – IAQ has quantifiable metrics, established standards, and direct impacts on occupant health.



Indeed, ventilation is the most heavily regulated aspect linked to health in UK building standards. Part F of the Building Regulations (commonly known as *Approved Document F*) sets mandatory ventilation criteria that retrofit projects must meet. The same principles are echoed in Scottish Building Standards but with some numerical differences in airflow rates and testing requirements. Understanding this regulatory framework helps decode which wellbeing claims stand on solid ground.

Approved Document F vs Scottish Building Standards — Same Goals, Slightly Different Numbers

Aspect Approved Document F (England & Wales) Scottish Building Standards Ventilation Rates Specified minimum airflow rates for different rooms (e.g., 8 l/s per person in living rooms) Similar principles but sometimes higher flows required (e.g., kitchens, bathrooms) Testing Methods Prescriptive and performance-based options Focus on performance compliance with local guidance Focus Adequate removal of pollutants, moisture, CO2 Same goals, tailored to local climates and construction traditions

You can find detailed guidance for England & Wales on the UK Government's gov.uk Approved Document F page. For Scottish standards, check the Scottish Government's building standards resources, which align closely but differ in exact thresholds.

Spotting Overclaims: What Do Miracle Wellbeing Promises Look Like?

A reminder: no retrofit can "treat" illness or guarantee profound wellbeing changes. Beware of claims such as:

- "This upgrade will cure allergies or asthma."
- "Our materials detoxify your home environment."
- "You'll sleep better and be happier instantly after retrofit."
- "Our system completely eliminates mould and dampness."

Such marketing oversimplifies, omits critical context, and neglects the complex causes of health problems. Real improvements come from systematic, evidence-led approaches that identify and correct underlying causes, especially ventilation and moisture control.

Airtightness vs Accidental Ventilation: Where Many Retrofits Go Wrong

Sealing drafts and improving insulation—popular retrofit measures—are usually beneficial but only if properly balanced with ventilation. Uncontrolled accidental ventilation may seem like "free" fresh air, but is often insufficient to maintain healthy IAQ, especially in older tenement buildings where original construction featured natural airflow gaps.

Overzealous airtightness without adequate designed ventilation risks creating pockets of stale, moist air that fuel condensation and mould growth – ironically worsening wellbeing symptoms.

This balance between airtightness and ventilation is often misunderstood or under-prioritised by retrofit teams focused on energy savings alone. To avoid this pitfall, teams should always propose solutions that meet or exceed ventilation standards rather than relying on accidental ventilation.

The Role of Moisture, Condensation, and Mould as Symptomatic Indicators

Moisture-related issues such as condensation and mould growth rarely appear randomly — they are symptomatic of inadequate ventilation or poor moisture management. When retrofit projects claim to "fix mould" without addressing ventilation gaps or occupant moisture generation, it's a warning sign that wellbeing claims may be hollow.

Effective retrofit should control moisture sources, provide adequate ventilation, and ensure building fabrics are resilient to variable humidity. Tenement retrofits often struggle here due to older fabric but good design can mitigate many risks.

Using Tools to Verify Ventilation and Indoor Air Quality Claims

As a retrofit coordinator and tech enthusiast, I always recommend verifying ventilation effectiveness using simple tools before buying into wellbeing marketing claims. For example, **cheap indoor air monitors** that measure carbon dioxide (CO2) levels provide a practical proxy for ventilation adequacy.

Why CO2? Because human breath raises indoor CO2 concentrations; if these levels get too high, it implies insufficient fresh air exchange. Typical healthy indoor CO2 levels hover around 400-600 ppm, while levels consistently above 1000 ppm indicate under-ventilation.

Such monitors, widely available and affordable, can quickly identify problematic spaces post-retrofit or even during occupancy to pinpoint ventilation gaps. This simple measurement beats vague or untestable wellbeing claims every time.

Further Reading and Resources

- Magnific's innovative indoor environmental monitoring tech offers advanced insights (Image credit: Magnific)
- UK Government Approved Document F page - Essential guidance on ventilation requirements
- Releaf THC oil education page - For understanding wellbeing products with no direct links to building retrofit

Note that products like THC oil or aromatherapy may contribute to subjective wellbeing but are unrelated to building performance and ventilation. Genuine retrofit wellbeing benefits stem from regulated environmental controls, not wellness marketing gimmicks.



Summary: How to Avoid Falling for Overclaims

1. **Ask About Ventilation Compliance:** Does the retrofit meet or exceed Approved Document F or Scottish Standards?
2. **Demand Evidence:** Request ventilation test results, ideally with CO2 monitoring data to verify air quality.
3. **Beware of Blanket Health Claims:** Avoid teams promising miracles, cures, or immediate wellbeing boosts without scientific basis.
4. **Scrutinize Airtightness vs Ventilation:** Airtightness is beneficial only if balanced with designed ventilation strategies.

5. **Inspect Moisture Management:** Check for measures that address condensation and mould through ventilation and fabric resilience.

6. **Use Available Tools:** Employ indoor air quality monitors yourself to validate post-retrofit conditions.

By grounding retrofit decisions in solid evidence, regulatory compliance, and pragmatic measurements, you can separate genuine wellbeing benefits from overclaiming or vague promises. Retrofitting tenements and older homes is complex but done right it delivers lasting comfort, health, and energy savings — without the edinburgharchitecture.co hype.

If you want advice specific to your retrofit project or need help interpreting IAQ measurements, feel free to reach out. In the meantime, keep your *pocket CO2 monitor* handy – it's often the most telling tool on site.