

new ideas  
new thinking



Director, Eliane Khoury, says:  
“People now spend, on average, more than 85 per cent of their time inside and this, coupled with a rise in indoor air pollutants, such as smoke, dust and air-borne infectious diseases, can be a real issue for anybody who is sensitive to changes in pollution, or has a weakened immune system or chronic disease.”

To tackle the problem, VFA has created systems that clean the air and disinfect it from hazardous airborne contaminants such as fine particles - dust, pollen; chemicals - diesel and fuel particles and biological airborne contaminants, such as bacteria, viruses, spores and fungi.

## Virus Free Air Securing clean air through innovation

Over the last few years there has been an increasing drive by the building sector to use more sustainable building materials, reduce heat loss in homes through insulation and draft proofing and generally upgrade the fabric of properties. But greener buildings do not always mean healthier buildings. While not yet a component of green building policy there is an increasing interest in the healthiness of the indoor environment. Within western societies most people now spend around 90% of their time indoors and poor air quality affects productivity and sickness within offices. How our low carbon buildings of the future will address this issue is becoming increasingly important.

One company well positioned to take a share of this potentially vast market is Dutch campaigning business, Virus Free Air (VFA). Launched in 2007 as a spin-off from an incubator at the Delft University of Technology (TU Delft), the company believes that everyone everywhere has the right to clean and safe air. VFA makes patented, electrostatic air purification systems and creates bespoke clean air solutions for clients such as factories, schools and elderly care homes, while also providing research and consultancy into air quality.

“Our systems are unique,” continues Eliane, “They don’t use conventional filters, they are highly efficient and can eliminate biological airborne contaminants; they are flexible under varying conditions such as

temperature, airflow and humidity and are consumer friendly, easily controlled and require very little maintenance. Our systems also use sustainable technology with low energy consumption.”

**VFA’s products are already finding a market. Since 2009 turnover has doubled year on year. But like all start-ups, the company has needed a helping hand to enable it to find new markets and expand. In this respect, EcoMind, the European Interreg IV A 2 Seas co-funded, environmental market and innovation development programme for SMEs, has provided just the right kind of support. EcoMind helps small businesses and start-ups take full advantage of the growing market for low carbon goods and services by overcoming the barriers in developing and promoting innovative eco-technology products and services.**

**VFA was first approached by EcoMind’s partner, Enviu, the Rotterdam-based, sustainable innovation organisation agreed to manage the relationship between VFA and students.**

“EcoMind has really helped raise the profile of VFA. Last year, for example, they supported and organised for us to go to the Environord conference, in Lille, France, where we won the Eco-Innovation Award for promising ecological innovation and we are still feeling the benefit of this. Without EcoMind, we would never have gone to the conference; I didn't even know it existed! For a small start-up business it is a great support and I do my best to promote it wherever I go.”



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“They explained the process and I was very keen straight away,” says Eliane. “An action plan was put together; what we really needed were students to come and work with us on R&D, but as a start-up we didn't have a lot of financial resources to co-ordinate this.”

Eliane found that once VFA was 'in the loop' with EcoMind, her company benefitted in many other ways, such as attending social marketing workshops and networking events. EcoMind has helped VFA to increase the company exposure and increase the awareness of indoor air quality.



Enviu was happy to have worked with VFA as a beneficiary in the project. The combination of recruiting and coaching students, and enabling VFA to go to relevant events (on one of which they even won an innovation award) was a nice set of activities that fit VFA's needs at that time. Enviu develops sustainable business solutions and brings them to the market, and supports others in doing so.

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**enviu**  
innovators in sustainability

