



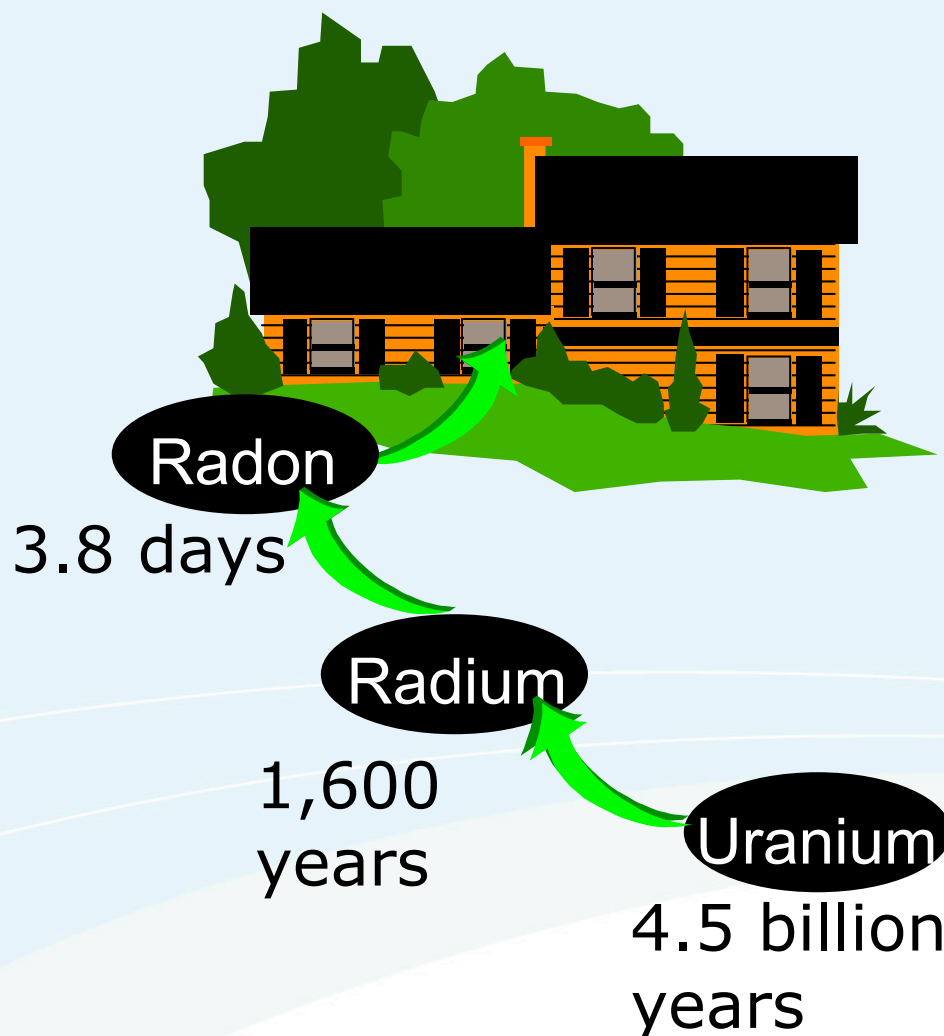
Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland
An Institiúid Éireannach um Chosaint Raideolaíoch

Developing a National Radon Control Strategy for Ireland

Stephanie Long, RPII

Radon

- Radon is a radioactive gas
- It is naturally occurring
- The primary source of radon is from the ground
- It comes from the radioactive decay of uranium which is present in all rocks and soils



Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland

- **Statutory Agency of the Department of the Environment**
- **Key Functions**
 - **Advice to Government and public**
 - **Regulatory Authority**
 - **Monitoring and Measurement**



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Advice to Government and public

Public Awareness Campaigns

- **Working closely with our Public Relations Agency, Murray Consultants**
- **Communicating with national/local politicians and Local Authorities**
- **Communicating with members of the public**

Engaging with other State Agencies (MoU)

- **Health Services Executive**
- **Health and Safety Authority**



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RPII does not :

- Approve radon measurement services
- Carry out radon remediation (list on website)
- Train radon remediators (no training courses)
- Implement Building Regulations (Dept. of Environment and Local Authorities)
- Provide medical advice



Radon and ALARA

- Linked to about 12% of lung cancer deaths (internationally 3 % – 14%)
- Radon makes the largest contribution to both the collective and individual dose
- Tackling radon needs input from many State Agencies working together
- Even more important in times of economic need
- A cohesive strategy to reduce radon doses is needed



National Radon Strategy



Seeking support for the development of a Strategy

Persuade others they have a role in tackling radon:

- Public Health Agency (HSE)
- Health professionals (HSE)
- Health and Safety Authority (HSA)
- Local Government (DECLG)
- Building control (Local Government)
- Local and national politicians



Seeking support for the development of a Strategy

- Joint Position statement with HSE (2010) declaring radon a manageable public health risk and recommending the development of a National Radon Control Strategy
- Briefing the Minister for the Environment and other national and local politicians



Seeking support for the development of a Strategy

Supporting Local Authorities in their radon programmes in social housing:

- Guidance documents
- Practical advice re measurement and remediation
- Support with communications with tenants, local politicians and the media



Seeking support for the development of a Strategy

National Radon Forum

- Attendance by staff from Government Departments and Agencies
- Local national and local politicians invited
- Venue has allowed the message to be targeted
 - 2010 Forum held in Cork to highlight Local Authority work (4300 units measured)
 - 2011 Forum was held close to Parliament and opened by the Minister for the Environment



National Public Awareness

- Highlight exceptional readings ($>2,000 \text{ Bq/m}^3$)
- National and local media coverage
- State broadcaster (RTE) has covered the issue



Local Public Awareness

- “Radon Week” in high radon counties
- One message “take the radon test”
 - Briefing to local and national politicians
 - Public meetings
 - Media advertising
 - Interviews on local radio
 - Mail shot to each home
 - Billboards
 - Leaflet distribution



Local Publicity – what does it look like?

Sligo home 13 times over cancer causing gas limit

Radiation dose same as getting 3,000 x-rays a year

A HOUSE has been identified in county Sligo with extremely high concentrations of cancer-causing radon gas. The house, located in the Ballymote area, had radon levels which were over 13 times the acceptable level.

Nationally, radon is the second biggest cause of lung cancer after smoking and is linked to about 200 lung cancer deaths each year.

The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) informed the homeowner, who had undertaken a radon measurement, that the average level in the house was greater than 1,800 becquerels (a unit of measurement of radioactivity) per cubic metre or 13 times the acceptable level of 200.

The radiation dose received by occupants of the house living with this radon concentration is equivalent to receiving nine chest x-rays per day or over 3,000 per year. Following advice, the homeowner took immediate action to fix the problem by having a radon sump installed beneath the house which prevents high radon levels over accumulating in the house again.

Commenting on the finding, David Fenton, Senior Scientist at the RPII, said: "The identification of this house is a further reminder that many people throughout the country are living with dangerous levels of radiation in their homes."

The RPII recently ran an intensive campaign in Sligo urging homeowners to protect themselves. Sligo is a high radon area with an estimated one in every four homes having high levels of the natural occurring gas.

On the RPII's website

(www.rpii.ie) anyone can search for their address on an interactive radon map to see whether their home or workplace is in a High Radon Area. They can find out what they need to know about radon - what it is, why it is a problem and how they can have a measurement made. Information can also be obtained on freephone 1800 300 600.

Measuring for radon and, in the event of a high reading, reducing the levels present are both relatively inexpensive. To test for radon, one detector is placed in a bedroom and a second in a living room for a three-month period. The detectors are small and can be sent and returned by post for analysis. The RPII charge €15 for a radon measurement. A list of other companies who carry out measurements can be accessed at www.rpii.ie or by calling 1800 300 600.

Ballymote home records high levels of radon gas

A house in Ballymote has been identified as having extremely high concentrations of radon gas, prompting calls for homeowners here to measure the levels in their homes and avoid putting the health of local families at risk. The house, located in the Ballymote area, had radon levels which were over 13 times the normal acceptable level.

Radon is the second biggest cause of lung cancer after smoking and is linked to about 200 lung cancer deaths each year. Over the past few weeks the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) has been running the 'Test your home' campaign in areas at risk from the radioactive gas and had an intensive campaign in Sligo.

The RPII believes it is very likely that there are more homes here with similarly high radon levels and urges people to test for the gas and reduce their risk of lung cancer.

Senior Scientist at the RPII, David Fenton, says Sligo is among the worst affected counties in the country when it comes to radon levels.

"We regularly find houses with very high radon concentrations and we know there are more. We would urge people not to ignore this warning and to test for radon in their homes."

The radiation dose received by occupants of the Ballymote house living with this radon concentration is equivalent to receiving nine chest x-rays per day, or over 3,000 per year. Following advice, the homeowner took immediate action. A radon sump was installed beneath the house which prevents high radon levels over accumulating in the house again. The homeowner is currently waiting on a post-

radiation measurement to ensure the levels have been reduced.

The Malcolms, a community activist in Ballymote, says the findings indicate that this is a serious issue requiring urgent attention.

"If you had water flood or any other natural disaster that was a public health issue, there would be an emergency plan put in place. In Sligo we have a very high radon risk and there's a lack of public information."

Mr Malcolms added that he would be writing to the Minister for the Environment to have a national testing plan for radon introduced for high risk areas such as Sligo.



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Progress to date

- In November 2011, the Minister for the Environment announced a Government decision develop a National Radon Control Strategy for Ireland
- Inter-Agency Group appointed by the Minister
 - 4 Government Departments
 - 6 Government Agencies
- Strategy to be published by November 2013



Progress to date

Inter-Agency Group work programme comprised of 6 work packages:

1. Radon prevention in new buildings
2. Use of administrative/legal measures to increase the rate of testing
3. Communications and public information
4. Competence in radon remediation
5. Competence in radon measurement
6. Radon in workplaces

In parallel with:

- Stakeholder engagement
- Economic analysis



Progress to date – on schedule

- Interim report to be submitted to the Minister by November 2012
- Public Consultation begins January 2013



Thank you for your attention

Any Questions?



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