Developing a National Radon Control Strategy for Ireland

Stephanie Long, RPII
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
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
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

Strategic Coordination

Public health and education

Training - building professionals

Prevention - Building Regulation

Monitoring/evaluation/surveys

Media and public awareness

Persuade homeowners to measure

Health and Safety Regulation

Action levels
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 Bq/m$^3$)
- National and local media coverage
- State broadcaster (RTE) has covered the issue
National Publicity – what does it look like?

Home has radon dose equal to nine X-rays

Tracy Hogan
Environment Correspondent

A FAMILY in Sligo has been discovered to have 2.8 times the maximum safe exposure to radon gas, according to the Irish Radiological Protection Institute (RPII).

The RPII said that the family was exposed to levels of radon gas that were “considerably” above the safe limit for the average household.

Radon is a radioactive gas that is found in soil and rock and can enter homes through cracks in the foundation.

It is estimated that radon gas is the second biggest cause of lung cancer, after smoking.

A statement from the RPII said: “Radon is a significant radiation exposure in our homes and workplaces and it is estimated that 40,000 people are exposed to it.”

The RPII said that it is important for families to be aware of the risks associated with radon gas and to take steps to reduce their exposure.

Deadly gas found in homes nationwide

600 radon cases this year

John Mitchell
Environment Correspondent

The RPII said that it had identified 600 cases of radon gas exposure in homes and workplaces this year.

It said that the majority of cases had occurred in homes where the level of radon gas was above the safe limit.

The RPII said that it was concerned that many families were unaware of the risks associated with radon gas and that they were not taking steps to reduce their exposure.

FAMILY’S 3,000 X-RAYS A YEAR

Massive radiation dose from killer gas in house

A family in Sligo has been identified as having a radon gas level that is 13 times the safe limit.

The RPII said that the family was exposed to a level of radon gas that was “considerably” above the safe limit for the average household.

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Radon in home at dangerous level

Radioactive gas in Sligo house was 13 times above safe limit; institute’s tests reveal

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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
SLIGO home 13 times over cancer causing gas limit

Radiation dose same as getting 3000 x-rays a year

A HOME has been identified in the county as having high concentrations of radon gas, the cancer causing gas. The home in the Sligo town of Mullaghmore has been identified as having radon levels that are 13 times the acceptable level.

Radon exposure is the second largest cause of lung cancer after smoking and it is estimated that about 30,000 people in the Republic of Ireland have radon levels in their homes. The high levels of radon in the home are caused by a lack of fresh air circulation. The home is situated in Mullaghmore near the town centre.

The levels of radon were measured by the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) and found to be significantly higher than the acceptable levels. The RPII recommends that homes with high levels of radon should be ventilated to reduce the risk of lung cancer.

The RPII has also issued a warning to homeowners to check their houses for radon levels. The institute has produced a guide to help homeowners check their homes for radon levels. The guide can be found on the RPII website at www.rpii.ie.

Ballymote home records high levels of radon gas

On the RPII’s website
Progress to date

- In November 2011, the Minister for the Environment announced a Government decision to 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?