2009 Mean Radon Concentrations (WHO)
The Irish problem

• National reference level 200 Bq/m3
• 91,000 homes above reference level
• Linked to 200 lung cancer deaths per year
• Big regional variations – “high radon areas”
Public Awareness

- Aware of radon  77%
- Radon in the home is a health risk  56%
- Likely to have your home tested  36%
- Likely to take action if radon reading is high  c25%

*Awareness does not automatically lead to action*
Communications Can Promote Action

Only if there is:

- Clearly understood message
- Repetition of message
- Same message, different sources
- Human stories – making the threat real
- Making action look easy: offer citizens a clear pathway to dealing with the issue
Build Public/Political Interest
(all politics is local)

Radon Map

Political Map
Original Strategy

• Local road shows – public meetings

• Using high radon readings to win local media “hit”

• National press release 2-3 times a year
Perceived Limitations of Original Strategy

- National coverage not intensive enough to force citizens to act (“that isn’t about me”)
- Regional presence sporadic
- Regional public meetings not backed by other communications channels
- Tended to be “invitation-led”
Current Strategy

• Not only a public meeting but a local “Radon Week” in high radon areas.
• Three to four each year
• Follow up PR activity in areas previously targeted
• National PR activity reinforces local campaign
Public Awareness Campaigns - Local

- Select high radon counties
- “Radon week” in each one
- One message: “Take the radon test”
- 6 of 26 counties so far, more to come
Local Campaign Elements

- Message is from RPII, Govt, local authority, HSE
- Public meetings
- Educating local TDs (members of parliament)
- Local media coverage
- Recruiting local media & editors as supporters
- Extensive concentrated advertising
- Direct mail drop to all households
- Informing local doctors
- On street activity – leaflets
- Follow up PR activity in targeted counties
Local – What it looks like

Sligo home 13 times over cancer causing gas limit

Radiation dose same as getting 3000 x-rays a year

A recent report has revealed that a home in Sligo has 13 times the cancer-causing gas limit. The Radiation Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) has confirmed that the home in question, which is located in Ballymote, has readings of radon gas that are extremely high. Radon gas is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer if exposed to over time.

Ballymote home records high levels of radon gas

The RPII has recommended that the home be evacuated and that the residents seek alternative accommodation. The RPII has also advised that the home be tested for radon gas levels and that any necessary mitigation measures be taken to reduce the levels.

Take the RADON test

The Facts

- More than 20% of homes measured in Waterford have high levels of the radioactive gas radon
- Radon gas causes up to 200 lung cancer deaths each year in Ireland
- Radon gas affects us all, but the risk is greater for smokers
- You cannot see, smell or taste radon gas
- A simple test can tell you if your home is safe

Visit www.rpii.ie or Freefone 1800 300 600
Public Awareness Campaigns - National

• We highlight exceptional readings

• Regular local and national press coverage of these

• State broadcaster (RTE) has taken up the issue

• Prosecuted employers in the past

• National Radon Forum
Radon in home at dangerous level

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

DEADLY GAS FOUND IN HOMES NATIONWIDE

600 radon cases this year

Home has radon dose equal to nine X-rays

FAMILY’S 3,000 X-RAYS A YEAR

Massive radiation dose from killer gas in house

600 homes have lethal levels of lung cancer gas

Alarm as radon tests hit high

It is necessary for people to get their homes tested and have radon levels checked.

Murray Consultants
Strategic Communications & Issues Management
Results

- National testing rate in 2010 four times 2009 figure
- Up to ten years measurements in one month in targeted counties
- The issue is now on the radar of national and local media
- A significant number of national politicians (18 TDs, 6 Senators) and local councillors have been personally educated on the issue by us. Some now champion the issue
Radon Test Measurement 2010-2012

Week ending
Ongoing Limitations

- Awareness doesn’t automatically provoke action

- 33% increase in number of houses measured in some areas but just 2% of total housing stock. At this rate it will take 400 years to measure all homes!

- Initial action – measurement – doesn’t automatically reduce dose. Just 25% of those with high levels remediate their homes.

- ALARA principle is about reducing dose

- This can only be done through a National Radon Strategy – RPII role is only part of this
A National Radon Strategy

What is it?

Joined up action from all relevant local and national public bodies to reduce the threat of radon gas.
National Radon Strategy
Possible Elements

- Educating health professionals
- Changing building regulations
- Writing the issue into health and safety law and practice
- National testing programme of public and private premises
- Research

- New conveyancing laws
- Education of media
- Public information
- Grants for remediation of premises
- Schools – education and testing
Steps to a National Radon Strategy

1. Recognition and agreement that there is a problem
2. Definition of the problem and its scale
3. Political commitment to reducing radon dose
4. Report and draft strategy from Inter-Agency Group
5. Public consultation on draft strategy
6. Government approval of and buy-in to strategy
7. Implementation
Don’t wait for a national strategy!

- Raise public awareness
- Test homes
- Inform decision-makers and relevant State agencies

While seeking a national strategy, implement your part of it now!
Discussion