

## **4<sup>th</sup> Irish National Radon Forum**

### **Report of Proceedings**

#### **Introduction**

This document reviews the discussion sessions of the fourth National Radon Forum held in Tralee on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2005. This document does not purport to be a comprehensive report of the day's proceedings. The reader is invited to view the presentations which are available on the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland's (RPII) website on: [www.rpii.ie/radon/Presentations\\_Fourth\\_NRF.htm](http://www.rpii.ie/radon/Presentations_Fourth_NRF.htm). These presentations together with this report should give a flavour of the topics discussed. Appendix 1 lists the Forum attendees.

#### **Session 1: The radon problem in Co Kerry**

- Mr Jimmy Deenihan, T.D., called for Tralee to be designated as a “hot spot” and will ask the Minister to do so because of the extent and seriousness of the problem locally. He suggested that a grant should be made available at least for the homes with the highest radon concentrations. He suggested that this grant scheme could be reassessed after a trial period. He added that radon awareness efforts need to come from the Government for implementation by bodies such as the RPII, local authorities, etc. He suggested that awareness locally in the Tralee area is reasonably high nonetheless he urged all householders to have their house tested.
- Dr Pat O'Connor (Assistant Director of the Geological Survey of Ireland) suggested that free measurements should be offered to all householders in all High Radon Areas to increase the detection rate of high houses. An RPII representative said that this may well be of some use but cautioned that free measurements on their own would not be sufficient. He said that experience had shown that at best it was likely that only approximately 30% of householders would avail of free radon measurements.
- Mr Alan Ellard (Radon Ireland Group) suggested that local authorities should play a greater role in radon awareness efforts. Decentralising the awareness effort

is critical. Most people are not overly concerned about radon, therefore much still needs to be done to raise their awareness of the dangers of radon exposure.

## **Session 2: Health effects and public awareness**

- Dr James McLaughlin (University College Dublin) suggested that many of the 200 deaths linked to radon exposure will occur at levels below 200 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>, and trying to identify only high homes would save a smaller number of people (those living in the higher concentration who are most at risk). The most cost effective way of dealing with this was by proper implementation of the Building Regulations as these seemed to be the only way of reducing the average radon level into the future and therefore reduce the number of related deaths.
- Mr Ellard stated that unlike the RPII, his company (Radon Ireland Group) has seen a significant rise in the number of workplaces carrying out radon measurements. This observation was welcomed by the RPII representative who commented that the RPII's awareness campaign may be more effective than first thought at increasing awareness amongst employers regarding radon.
- An audience member suggested that future radon road shows should be held on Saturdays as Saturday tends to be the busiest shopping day. The RPII indicated that they would try this approach.

## **Session 3: Radon Remediation and Prevention**

- In his presentation Mr Eugene Monaghan (Radon Centre Wexford) made the following points:
  - Involvement of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) in regulating radon in workplaces is crucial because it is the HSA that employers pay most heed to.
  - Homes with potential radon problems are being built at a much higher rate than homes that are currently being remediated. Therefore, there needs to be

a dramatic change in the political involvement, in state funding and in legislation if we want to reduce this gap.

- Making new house measurement mandatory and improving the rate of inspections at the time of construction are the two main factors which can contribute to eliminating the radon problem for new homes.
  - Radon barriers should be installed in every new building (like in Northern Ireland) and buildings should be tested.
  - Regarding radon remediation of existing houses, affordability is a problem for some householders. Therefore, the cost of remediation should be reduced, but the remediation industry is not large enough to lower the costs. Therefore, grants or tax incentives need to be made available.
  - Advice from the RPII that householders employ an architect to advise them on remediation is unhelpful and can add significantly to the total costs.
  - Remediation is simple and can normally be completed within a day. This should be made clear when explained to the public. There are exceptions, as some remedial works can sometimes be more complicated, and therefore, cost will increase, but overall, it is not the case.
  - Road shows are a very good initiative, but not enough. There is a need for information to be provided from a range of different sources and on a constant basis in order to reinforce the message.
- Mr Monaghan further suggested that standby sumps in new buildings are not cost-effective and should be discontinued. Dr McLaughlin and Mr Kevin Sheridan (FAS) disagreed with this and pointed out that the provision of a standby sump in a new house adds very little to the cost of a new house.
  - Mr Monaghan also suggested that radon testing in new houses should be made mandatory. Mr Johnny McGettigan (Building Control Officer, Donegal County Council) agreed with this and pointed out that he lobbied for this provision to be included in the recent revision of Technical Guidance Document-C of the Building Regulations.

## Appendix 1

### List of Attendees

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