

Address by:  
Mr. Michael Finneran T.D.  
Minister for Housing and Local Services,

On the occasion of  
Seventh National Radon Forum

At  
Royal College of Physicians of Ireland,  
No. 6 Kildare Street, Dublin 2.

On  
19 November 2009

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I'm delighted to be here with you this morning. I thank the Chief Executive of the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII), Dr. Ann McGarry, and the Board of Directors for your kind invitation to give the opening address here this morning. I am very pleased to welcome you all to the 7th Irish National Radon Forum.

The aim of the Forum is to provide the opportunity for those with an interest in radon to meet and discuss issues of mutual interest. The forum will focus on the assessment of the radon risk during conveyancing, policies for addressing radon in social housing and a public health perspective to radon control.

The implementation of an effective radon control strategy aimed at protecting the public against indoor radon exposure requires the input from many national agencies and other key stakeholders. These agencies need to work together as part of a cohesive and cost effective strategy developed on a national level aimed at reducing the risk posed by radon in this country. This year's forum will review elements of a national radon control strategy and will explore the use of cost effectiveness analysis in developing a radon control strategy.

In Europe radon can be linked to over 20,000 lung cancers deaths each year. In Ireland radon is linked to some 200 lung cancer deaths each year making radon a significant public health hazard. In this context and in the context of moving towards a radon strategy the forum will hear how the two key agencies, the RPII and HSE, worked together towards a common position on radon.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas found in variable amounts in rocks and soil. When it surfaces in the open air, it is quickly diluted. However, where it enters an enclosed space, such as an ordinary building, it can, under certain circumstances accumulate to reach unacceptably high concentration levels. Long term exposure to high radon levels presents a direct risk to human health.

Ireland's unique geology, while providing us with a beautiful and rich landscape, gives rise to radon levels that are above the European average. The average indoor radon concentration in Ireland, weighted for population is 91 Bq/m<sup>3</sup> (becquerels per metre cubed) compared to a European average of 59 Bq/m<sup>3</sup> (becquerels per metre cubed). In Ireland homes with very high radon concentrations, above the National Reference Level of 200 Bq/m<sup>3</sup> (becquerels per metre cubed), are all too commonly encountered.

Radon is a known carcinogen and contributes to the incidence of lung cancer. This risk is especially great for smokers. Everybody needs to be aware of the risks from radon and of the potential health consequences if they are exposed to high radon concentrations. This is especially true in High Radon Areas where the risk of such exposure is greater.

The good news is that there are things that can be done, like testing houses and taking remediation measures.

The Scheme of Housing Aid for Older People is available to assist older people, generally over 60 years, to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out to their homes. Where a suite of works is being grant aided under this scheme, Local Authorities may also, as part of the package of works, assist with the provision of radon remediation works, where applicable.

The National Survey of Radon in Irish Dwellings was conducted by the RPII between 1992 and 1999. This survey quantified comprehensively the scale of the radon problem in Irish dwellings and identified those parts of the country where high indoor radon levels are more likely to be found. From the results of this survey it was estimated that approximately 7% of our total housing stock has radon levels above the National Reference Level. Approximately one third of the country is designated as a High Radon Area, where more than 10% of households are predicted to have radon concentrations above the National Reference Level.

In light of these facts the Government, mainly through the RPII, has invested significant resources to highlighting the risks radon poses to the public. Today's Forum is one such initiative.

Radon is the principal source of radiation exposure in Ireland and it is present all around us. We are all exposed to radon on a daily basis. I encourage every householder to have their home tested for radon, this is especially important if your house is located in a High Radon Area.

I commend the work of the RPII in raising awareness of the dangers posed by radon exposure among relevant authorities and policy makers as well as members of the public.

In terms of reducing our exposure to radiation radon is the area where the greatest impact is possible. Proven, effective remediation techniques exist to reduce indoor radon concentrations at reasonable cost. Further information can be found on the RPII website, [www.rpii.ie](http://www.rpii.ie), or by contacting the RPII on Freephone 1800 300 600.

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government plays a key role, and will continue to play a key role, in implementing national policy on radon, not only as the parent Department of the RPII but through its role in drafting Building Regulations and in providing technical guidance on radon remediation solutions.

The Building Regulations introduced by the Department in 1998, and up-dated in 2004, require all new buildings, including new houses, to incorporate radon protection measures at the time of construction. These radon prevention measures were in advance of building code requirements in many EU Member States. Since this time our national housing stock has increased by over 50%. It is most encouraging that so many new homes constructed over the past 10 years have these protective measures in place from the outset. This Government will continue to strive for improvements in the quality of our homes.

I wish to conclude by once again thanking Dr. Ann McGarry,

Chief Executive of the RPII for the invitation to address you this morning. I am sure you all will find the Seventh National Radon Forum to be both informative and beneficial through promoting inter-agency cooperation. I would like to thank you all for giving of your time in being here today and wish you a very successful meeting.

Thank you

ENDS

## Information on the speakers and presentations

1. Mr. David Pollard is a Director of the Measurement and Monitoring Division of RPII. David will give an overview of the radon problem in Ireland, the hazard from radon, the scale of the problem etc. David will also suggest elements of a radon control strategy,
2. Dr Ina Kelly is Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine HSE, Dublin and Mid Leinster based in Tullamore. Ina will give a Public Health Perspective on radon control in Ireland.
3. Ms Ann Marie Part is Area Chief Environmental Health Officer, Health Services Executive based in Dublin. Ann Marie will review the joint position of the RPII and HSE on radon.
4. Ms Stephanie Long is a Senior Scientist in the Radon Advice section of the RPII. Stephanie will review how including radon in conveyancing can be an effective tool in identifying homes above the Reference Level.
5. Mr. David Fenton is Manager of the Radon Advice Section of the RPII. David will review the RPII's guidance to Local Authorities on radon programmes in social housing.
6. Professor Alastair Gray is professor Health Economics at the University of Oxford. Alastair worked on the World Health Organisation's International Radon Project where he chaired the working group dealing with the Cost Effectiveness of radon control. Alastair's will present the framework and outline the parameters that need to be considered when carrying out cost effectiveness analysis.