

Opening Address by

Mr. Phil Hogan T.D.

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local
Government**

on the occasion of

The Ninth National Radon Forum

at

Chartered Accountants House, Pearse St, Dublin 2.

on

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Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished speakers, I am very pleased to be here to open the Ninth Irish National Radon Forum.

I am encouraged to see here at today's Forum a wide variety of people with different experiences and expertise to bring to bear on this important public health issue. I know that it is not easy to get a group of people like this together, and I hope that you take advantage of the opportunity by participating fully in the forum.

Exposure to radon gas contributes to approximately 200 lung cancer deaths in Ireland each year. Most exposure occurs in the home. Radon gas is the main source of radiation exposure in Ireland and represents over half of the average yearly dose of radiation across the population.

As many of you are doubtless aware, Ireland has high levels of radon gas by international standards. As we know, this is mainly due to our geology. Of course there are many aspects of our geology that we celebrate for their uniqueness and beauty, but it seems we can't enjoy them without some downsides, and radon gas is one. So, how can we deal with this problem? Fortunately, high radon levels in homes are easy to identify and once identified, are relatively simple to fix. Therefore, in terms of the public's exposure to radiation, this is the area where the greatest reduction can be achieved.

Of course, while those of us here know this only too well, one of the major challenges is the lack of awareness about the risks people face

from radon gas and what they can do to reduce them. In light of this, much of our effort until now has focussed on raising awareness of the problem, especially among people living in High Radon Areas. The RPII have done significant work in this area over a number of years and I would like to take this opportunity to commend their continuing efforts in this regard.

At present, despite some good progress in areas such as radon control in workplaces and schools, testing and remediation rates in private homes remain too low. We need to encourage more householders – many more householders – to test for radon.

Of course, raising awareness is only one dimension of the response to this problem. There are others. For more than a decade now it has been mandatory under my own Department's building regulations to install a radon barrier in all new homes built in High Radon Areas, as identified by the RPII. And the evidence shows that this measure does reduce radon levels where it is applied.

Awareness raising; regulation; these form part of the solution to the radon problem, but we need to do more.

This is one of those policy areas that requires better co-ordination across the large range of organisations involved. Reducing radon risk demands innovative and co-ordinated effort among different Government Departments, levels of government, state agencies, private companies and other interested bodies. We need to take

advantage of potential overlaps with other Government priorities, such as home retrofitting programmes, which may provide a good opportunity for the inclusion of radon testing and, where it's needed, remediation.

I am therefore pleased to be able to announce to you here today, the establishment of the National Radon Strategy Group. This is a new inter-agency group of representatives from those relevant public bodies with a role in radon control. This new Group has been established by Government, under the Chairmanship of my own Department to develop a National Radon Control Strategy for Ireland.

This Government's decision to develop an integrated National Strategy for Radon Control is in line with the recommendations of the RPII and the HSE, and is also recognised as international best practice. I know that later this morning you will have the opportunity hear about the experiences and ideas that led to the development of the strategy to tackle the Radon problem in Norway. The lessons learned there are sure to be of interest to this Forum and to our own new Strategy group.

Through its implementation, the Strategy is expected to deliver health and economic benefits, as well as making a modest contribution to job creation in the radon testing and remediation sectors.

The Strategy Group has been asked to develop a Strategy within two years. I addressed the Group's first meeting recently and I look forward to the outcome of their work. In seeking the best solutions to the radon problem, it will be important for the group to listen to its stakeholders, whose views can make an important contribution to its work. Today's forum is part of that process.

I wish to conclude by thanking the RPII for the invitation to address you this morning. I am sure you will find the Forum to be both informative and beneficial. I am certain that it is only by working together that we can develop an effective response to the radon problem in Ireland. I wish you a very successful Forum.

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