

9TH NATIONAL RADON FORUM

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

This document reviews the discussion session of the ninth National Radon Forum held in Dublin on 24th November 2011. It does not purport to be a comprehensive report of the day's proceedings and remarks attributed to individuals should not be interpreted as representative of the views or policy of the agencies represented.

The theme of the Forum was "Effective response to the radon problem in Ireland". The meeting was opened by Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG), Mr Phil Hogan T.D. and chaired by the Assistant Secretary of the DECLG, Ms Mary Moylan.

The speakers and presentations were as follows:

Mr Phil Hogan T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government

[Opening address](#)

Dr. Kevin Kelleher (HSE)

[Radon - a manageable risk to public health in Ireland](#)

Mr. David Fenton (RPII)

[What do we know about the current remediation rates and costs in Ireland?](#)

Mr William Strandring (Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority)

[The Norwegian Radon Strategy - a case study](#)

Mr. David Pollard (RPII)

[Stakeholder input to the National Radon Strategy](#)

The reader is invited to view the agenda and presentations which are available on the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland's (RPII) [website](#). The presentations, together with this report, should give the reader a flavour of the topics discussed.

Discussion

Mary O'Mahony (HSE) asked **William Strandring (NRPA)** to elaborate on the inclusion of radon in land planning and source specific remediation and also regarding the definition of a high radon area by the NRPA. In Norway, it is common practise to assess land before building for risks such as landslides and earthquakes. One of the 6 sub-strategies of the Norwegian radon strategy addresses the inclusion of radon in this planning process. In addition, the NRPA believe that prior to remediation a building should be assessed to identify the source of entry to ensure that remediation is carried out at the source. Much of Norway is classified as a radon prone area and different levels of risk are indicated using a system of red, amber and green, indicating high, medium and low risk.

Patrick Gilligan (Mater Private Hospital and RPII Board Member) asked **William Strandring (NRPA)** whether the legally binding limits for schools and kindergartens that will require a 100 Bq/m³ action level and a 200 Bq/m³ maximum level were based on greater risks to children from radon exposure. **Mr Strandring (NRPA)** replied that the longer potential exposure period for children means that they are considered at greater risk than adults. **Kevin Kelleher (HSE)** added that a precautionary approach is usually taken to protect the health of children by using a lower limit of exposure. **Mr Strandring (NRPA)** added that measuring in schools and kindergartens is an important way of communicating the radon message to parents.

James McLoughlin (UCD) pointed out that it is important not to de-emphasise the risk to non-smokers and to note that there is a tenuous link between radon exposure and childhood leukaemia. He also felt it important to communicate the risk from radon in a different way, for example, the fact that there is one death in Ireland every 48 hours due to radon induced lung cancer has more impact than using radon concentrations to illustrate the size of the risk from radon. **Kevin Kelleher (HSE)** agreed that risk communication can be difficult, particularly when there are a number of risk factors to be communicated. He added that in his presentation he focussed on the synergy between radon and smoking, but the message regarding the risk to non-smokers is also an important one that should be highlighted every time a very high radon measurement is carried out.

Eamonn Smyth (DECLG) asked for a clarification of the difference between the 100 Bq/m³ target level and 200 Bq/m³ maximum level. **William Strandring (NRPA)** pointed out that this recommendation has not yet been finalised but that 200 Bq/m³ is the reference level below which homes are recommended to be but that 100 Bq/m³ is the level that any remedial work should be aiming to achieve.

Chris Scivyer (Building Research Establishment) added that in the UK the action level is 200 Bq/m³ but there is also a lower target level of 100 Bq/m³. If concentrations above 200 Bq/m³ are measured, they should be reduced to below 100 Bq/m³. The experience from the UK seems to be that this has been confusing for the public so it is important to keep the message simple by specifying one reference (or action) level only.

Tim O' Neill (Necoflex) pointed out that Kevin Kelleher's presentation detailed UK data re causes of lung cancer indicating that 83% of all lung cancers are due to smoking only but that the data for Ireland is very different. **David Pollard (RPII)** replied that there are significant differences between UK and Irish statistics since the average radon concentration in Irish homes at 89 Bq/m³ is significantly higher than the UK average of 20 Bq/m³. He added that across Europe, radon is linked to 9% of all deaths from lung cancer,

Úna Ní Dhubhghaill (DECLG) asked whether Norway plan to measure the effectiveness of the strategy by measuring the resulting reduction in the number of lung cancers. **William Strandring (NRPA)** replied that it would be very difficult to measure this since the effects of smoking would mask any impact a reduction in the average radon concentration would have on lung cancer incidence. There are a number of milestones to be met by 2014 and progress towards these will be evaluated in the interim.

James McLoughlin (UCD) added that he thought an important goal of the strategy should be to reduce the average radon concentration in Irish homes since many lung cancers are associated with exposure to moderate levels of radon.

Pol Clarke (Monaghan Co Co) asked whether a particular type of lung cancer is linked with radon exposure. **Mary O'Mahony (HSE)** replied that radon exposure will increase all types of lung cancer and has been shown to be particularly associated with small cell cancer.

Mary Moylan (DECLG) thanked the speakers for their informative and interesting presentations and added that there will be an opportunity to input to the development of the strategy through the stakeholder consultation process. She gave particular thanks **William Strandring** for dealing with so many of the questions. **Ann McGarry (RPII)** also thanked participants for attending. She added that the Minister's announcement to develop a national radon strategy was a very welcome and important step in tackling the radon problem in Ireland and hoped that over the coming months people will avail of the opportunity to engage in the strategy's development.