

12th NATIONAL RADON FORUM

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

This document reviews the discussion session of the twelfth National Radon Forum held in Wexford on 3rd June 2015. 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 meeting was opened by Laura Burke, Director General, Environmental Protection Agency and chaired by Ann McGarry, Director, Office of Radiological Protection, Environmental Protection Agency. The presentations were divided into two sessions, the first was National Radon Control Strategy – One Year On and the second was Filling knowledge gaps identified in the Strategy with discussion following each session. All speakers and presentations are listed below:

Welcome address - Laura Burke, Director General, Environmental Protection Agency

Session 1 - National Radon Control Strategy – one year on

Paul McDonald (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government)

Overview of the implementation of the strategy

David Fenton (Environmental Protection Agency)

Update from the steering group on radon prevention in new build

Bob Hanna (Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources)

Update from steering group on radon awareness

Eamonn Smyth (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government)

Update from the steering group on radon remediation

Session 2 - Filling knowledge gaps identified in the Strategy

Patrick Murphy (School of Mathematics, University College Dublin)

Updated national average indoor radon concentration for Ireland – methodology and preliminary results

Alison Dowdall (Environmental Protection Agency)

Current radon remediation methods and costs in Ireland

Stephanie Long (Environmental Protection Agency)

Pilot study on the impact of energy retrofitting on radon levels in local authority homes

The reader is invited to view the presentations above which, with this report, should give the reader a flavour of the topics discussed.

Discussion

Jane Bradley (Public Health England) asked Eamonn Smyth if the requirements for on-going assessment of registered remediation contractors had been considered. Mr Smyth replied that this is an area that the steering group have yet to address but it is likely that an auditing process will be put in place. This may also be specified in the contractors code of ethics.

Senator Cáit Keane thanked all the speakers for their informative presentations and asked if the presentations would be available after the meeting. Ann McGarry advised that all presentations would be available on the EPA website. With regard to the training course for radon remediators, Senator Keane recommended that the course be recognised by linking it to education authorities such as the Institutes of Technology. Eamonn Smyth pointed out that to obtain recognition from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) the course would need to be longer. He said that consideration will be given to how recognition for completing the course will be given. Senator Keane noted that while some of the recommendations in the National Radon Control Strategy (NRCS) could be dealt with using a voluntary approach, there were some that should be strengthened and a mandatory approach taken. In particular, under Action 19 – developing a strategy to progress recommendations on conveyancing, she felt that mandatory legislation could be considered. Paul McDonald replied that good progress had been made on including radon in the conveyancing process. He pointed out that this was due to very positive engagement with the Law Society and the Society for Chartered Surveyors Ireland and commended the work done to date. He added that this voluntary approach was preferable as legislation would be complex and would require a heavy workload. Under Action 22- developing a paper on financial incentives to encourage action on radon, Senator Keane asked about the options considered. Paul McDonald advised that a range of home improvement schemes had been considered prior to producing the paper. The paper has been submitted to the Minister and the Department are awaiting his response. Senator Keane then asked about radon and workplaces and the impact of the implementation of the revised Basic Safety Standards (BSS). David Fenton replied that the BSS directive will be implemented in 2018 and highlighted that this is an opportunity to strengthen and improve the regulations dealing with radon in workplaces. Paul McDonald added that DECLG and the EPA have begun the scoping process looking at, for example if primary legislation might be needed or if implementation could be done under regulation.

With regard to the registration scheme for remediation contractors, Kevin Sheridan (Independent Consultant) informed the group that he sits on the Board of the Construction Industry Register in Ireland (C.I.R.I.) which is currently a voluntary scheme. He pointed out that when this becomes statutory, continuous professional development will be a requirement for contractors. In relation to the advisory note on BER certificates, Kevin Sheridan pointed out that this advice is for both domestic and commercial

properties. He asked about the training requirements for BER domestic assessors. Stephanie Long replied that standard information on radon will be included on all BER advisory reports irrespective of house characteristics. She added that the format of the BER reports is being reviewed and is scheduled for completion later this year. In addition the Code of Practice for contractors has already been amended to include advice and information about radon.

Mary O'Mahony (Health Service Executive) enquired about the focus of the information that would be provided on the new radon website given that primary prevention is key to reducing the risk from a public health perspective. Bob Hanna replied that the purpose of the website is to provide clear information on radon risk and what can be done to reduce it to all the groups involved. Eamonn Smyth added that the introduction of the Building Control Amendment Regulations has focused the minds of the construction industry on correct installation of preventive measures.

Tony McLaughlin (Radon Aware Group) acknowledged all of the work carried out to date implementing the NRCS. With regard to preventive measures, he pointed out that there are methods of testing the integrity of the radon barrier and he suggested that this could be brought to the attention of those involved in the sign off under the Building Control (Amendment) Act 2014. Ann McGarry acknowledged this recommendation.

James McLaughlin (European Radon Association) asked Patrick Murphy if socio-economic bias had been taken into account in the survey to determine the updated national average indoor radon concentration in Ireland. Patrick Murphy replied that using An Post's Geo-directory randomly selected homes in targeted grid squares had been chosen and no demographic information had been gathered. He pointed out that the introduction of postcodes in Ireland would be an opportunity to retrospectively match the EPA's dataset of volunteer measurements with geographic identifiers. James McLaughlin noted that the survey calculated the arithmetic mean and wondered if updating the population weighted mean was being considered. Patrick Murphy pointed out these were preliminary results of the National Radon Survey and the population weighted mean has been identified for future work. David Fenton added that an updated report should be available in 2015 which will include an updated population weighted mean.

Senator Keane enquired whether geology had been considered in the design of the survey. Patrick Murphy replied that the grid squares selected for the survey were stratified based on their radon risk and their geographic location. Senator Keane then asked had radon in groundwater been addressed in Ireland. Stephanie Long pointed out that the main risk from radon in groundwater is an increase in the level of radon in indoor air. She said that the EPA provide advice on radon in drinking water as well as a testing service and referred to a pilot study of radon in groundwater in Co. Wicklow carried out in 2001. Alison Dowdall added that a national survey of radon in approximately 220 public groundwater supplies had been carried out between 2011 and 2013. None of these groundwater supplies had exceeded the EPA's recommended level

of 500 Bq/l for a public drinking water supply. James Hodgson (Geological Survey of Ireland) pointed out that radon in groundwater is used as an indicator of transport mechanisms in groundwater.

Michael Whelan (Wexford County Council) expressed concern that hardcore material not meeting the specification set out in SR21 could be currently in use in Ireland. Eamonn Smyth advised that the amended SR21 containing the new specifications for hardcore material is out for public consultation until 3rd of July. Until this is implemented, either product can be used.

Senator Keane asked about the link between lung cancer and radon risk on the predictive map. Patrick Murphy replied that the map is a predictive tool showing areas where more homes with high levels of radon are found. He pointed out that homes with high levels of radon are also found in lower risk areas and he said that the message is that all homes should be tested. With regard to the reduction found in the average radon concentration for homes built post 1998 compared with those built pre 1998, he highlighted that this reduction doesn't affect all newly built homes but only those in High Radon Areas where the requirement to install a radon barrier applies.

With regard to the position of exhausts from fan assisted sumps, Eugene Monahan (All Clear Radon) informed the meeting that in some cases it is the home owners preference to install a sump with low level exhaust as it has less visual impact on the exterior of the home. He added that a sump with a low level exhaust is also easier to maintain in the long term.

Bob Hanna referred to the carbon monoxide awareness campaigns where statistical analysis had been carried out on pre and post campaign awareness. He said that this analysis had found that levels of awareness did vary depending on socio-economic factors. He then asked about the choice of 3 month testing period for the survey to update the new national average indoor radon level. Patrick Murphy explained that the three month period was selected during the months of the year where the seasonal correction factors were closest to a value of 1.

Elaine Doorley (Trinity College Dublin) noted that only a small number of householders had quoted health concerns as a reason for carrying out radon remediation in their home and she felt this message could be strengthened. With regard to the recommendation on addressing radon in the conveyancing process being a voluntary requirement, she felt that this should be a mandatory requirement similar to the BER given the health risk from radon exposure in the home.

With the forthcoming introduction of the revised BSS, Tony McLaughlin asked if the Reference Level for radon in workplaces would be reviewed and if so, how would that affect buildings that have already been tested. Ann McGarry replied that currently there is no proposal to change the Reference Levels. However, the Reference Levels will be

reviewed as part of the implementation of the revised BSS. She added that any changes would be evidence based. David Fenton pointed out that regardless of the Reference Level, buildings should be tested and remediated and that this message remains the same irrespective of the Reference Level.

Gary Moss (Track Analysis Systems) enquired if ageing and fading of detectors had been taken into consideration for the updated national average indoor radon concentration. David Fenton replied that this had been considered and all detectors used in the survey were less than 12 months old.

Jim Hodgson commended the work done by the EPA and pointed out that the the number of radon measurements carried out in Ireland was approximately three times that carried out in countries such as Germany and France. He said this was a valuable resource for making evidence based decisions.