

Environmental **Radon** Newsletter

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Penwith radon programme

Jane Bradley, Health Health Protection Agency, jane.bradley@hpa.org.uk

Although radon is thought by many to be associated only with areas of granite, high radon levels can be found in houses in many parts of the UK. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that the granite areas of South West England have the worst radon problems in the country.

Penwith District Council, in the far west of Cornwall, is currently operating a radon rollout programme in which householders will be offered the opportunity to have a free radon test. Many properties in the district have already been tested for radon, and early indications are that 1 in 3 properties in the district have concentrations of radon that are at or above the Action Level.

The Council is working closely with the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency, (HPA-RPD) to find high levels of radon in homes, and to reduce them where they are found. A major part of this work is an offer of a free radon test to every unmeasured home throughout the District. To this end, some 22,000 letters have been sent to householders.

The initiative has the support of the local Director of Public Health, Felicity Owen. Councillor Chris Goninan, Penwith District Council's Member Champion for Health has also encouraged householders to take part in the survey, saying:

"I strongly urge you to take up this free offer to have your property tested. I have already completed my form and sent it back to the Health Protection Agency to take advantage of the offer. The test is very simple. Two small plastic discs are placed in your property for three months, one in a living area and one in your bedroom.

After three months the discs are posted back to the Health Protection Agency who check to see what levels have been detected. Once the test result is known, a letter will be sent stating what levels of



Invitation letters being sent to householders

radon have been found. If the levels detected are above the recognised action level, that householder will then be invited to a drop-in session where they can get advice from a whole range of experts on what to do to reduce radon levels in their property."

The District Council, HPA-RPD and the Building Research Establishment have already held three very highly successful events, where over 150 people attended a drop-in session to obtain advice on how to reduce radon levels in their homes. These residents were given the opportunity to attend as they had previously had a test and levels were found to be high. Some of those attending the drop-in session have been given the chance to have another free test to see if the work they have undertaken has reduced levels of radon.

To help publicise the survey, and to give householders easy access to more information on radon, Penwith District Council has added a radon page to its website*. For further details of the initiative, email Ricky Williams (ricky.williams@penwith.gov.uk) or telephone on 01736 336586.

*www.penwith.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=21465

This newsletter and previous editions can be seen at www.hpa.org.uk/radiation/radon

POINTS OF CONTACT

Building Research Establishment (BRE)
Garston, Watford, WD2 7JR
www.bre.co.uk/radon

Radon Survey
Radiation Protection Division,
Health Protection Agency
Chilton, Didcot, OX11 0RQ
Tel 01235 822622
Fax: 01235 833891
www.hpa.org.uk/radiation/radon

Welsh Assembly Government
Housing Division
Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF1 3NQ
Tel: 01222 825219
Fax: 01222 825391

Environment and Heritage Service
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland
Calvert House, 23 Castle Place
Belfast, BT1 1FY
Tel: 01232 254754
Fax: 01232 254700

Scottish Executive Development Department
Housing Division 1
First Floor East, Victoria Quay
Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ
Tel: 0131 244 5575
Fax: 0131 244 5596

Health and Safety Executive
Health Directorate B6
Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge
London, SE1 9HF
Tel: 020 7717 6854
Fax: 020 7717 6717

Northern Radon Liaison Group
c/o Environmental Health Department
South Lakeland District Council
South Lakeland House, Lowther Street
Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 4UD

Radon South West Committee
Secretary: Gerald Hudd
46 Parkfield Drive, Taunton
Somerset TA1 5BU
Tel: 01823 355194
email: GAHudd@Somerset.gov.uk

Steering Group on Radon
(Northamptonshire and elsewhere)
Environmental Health Department,
Daventry District Council
Lodge Road, Daventry
Northamptonshire, NN11 5AF.

Derbyshire Radon Steering Group
c/o Environmental Health Department
Derbyshire Dales District Council
Town Hall, Matlock
Derbyshire, DE4 3NN

The Radon Council Limited
PO Box 39, Shepperton
Middlesex, TW17 8AD
Tel: 01932 221212
Fax: 01932 229779

Working towards a radon steering group for Northamptonshire

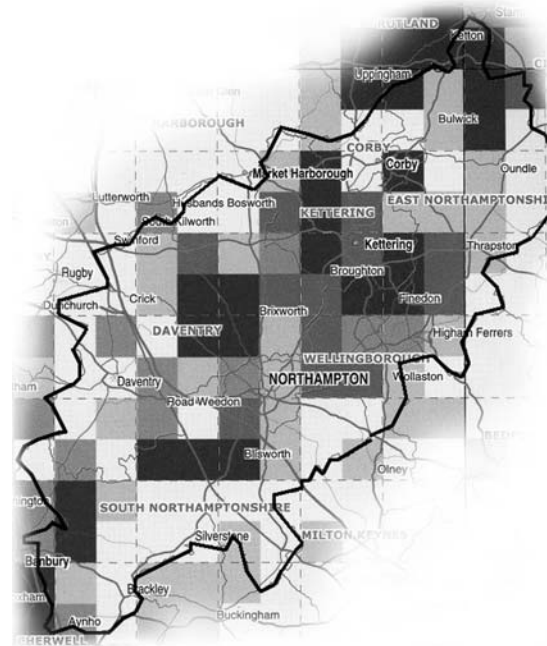
James Stewart-Evans, Health Protection Agency,
james.stewart-evans@hpa-em.nhs.uk

Radon steering groups are very important both nationally and locally, providing a forum for discussion and a local face for radon expertise. Parts of Northamptonshire are designated radon Affected Areas, and work within the county is underway to establish a local steering group to sustain an impetus towards radon dose reduction.

The first steps began with the "Radon and Health in Northamptonshire" seminar held on 6th November 2006 and organised in partnership between Daventry District Council, and the Health Protection Agency's Local and Regional Services (LaRS) and Radiation Protection Division (RPD). The partnership work between the two Divisions of the HPA proved beneficial; marrying the local focus of LaRS with RPD's established radon expertise.

The seminar raised local interest in, and awareness of, the radon issue across Northamptonshire. Seven local authorities were represented, with health and safety, building control, and environmental protection departments attending, as well as local health partners. Discussion throughout the seminar, and subsequent feedback, addressed the proposal for the reactivation of a local steering group to revitalise radon work within the county.

The steering group will provide a particular focus on radon issues in Northamptonshire, but may also extend to local authorities in areas not covered by pre-existing regional steering groups: encompassing the Jurassic ridge from Lincolnshire towards Hampshire. The group intends to provide both a means for information to be cascaded to local



authorities and interested parties and a conduit for local experience and best practice to be discussed and relayed back to policymakers.

The group will primarily concentrate on existing premises, both workplace and residential; promoting testing and subsequent remediation. To facilitate this, the creation of a membership charter will potentially outline the function and remit of the group and thus define member parties' commitments.

It is anticipated that the first steering group meeting will take place during the first quarter of 2007, after which the group will assemble biannually. The format may comprise a morning meeting of local authority lead officers and representatives of national agencies followed by an open afternoon session dedicated to workshops, presentations by other parties, including universities, and further discussion of issues. Other proposals under consideration include an annual workshop/meeting for radon practitioners and wider stakeholders.

Sending the right message

Daryl Dixon, Health Protection Agency, daryl.dixon@hpa.org.uk

Several factors make it difficult to get relevant messages about radon to those affected by it: the uneven geographical distribution of radon problems, the technical complexity of the subject, and the wide range of interested parties. It is important, nonetheless, to deliver appropriate information to enable people to manage their radon risk.

Numerous leaflets, guides, books and information notes on radon have been produced over the years by various bodies and in a variety of formats. At first, leaflets included considerable detail on the theoretical background and basis for action on radon. Such detail can, however, obscure the central message on radon - which is to find high levels and reduce them.

As the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency (HPA-RPD) has gained understanding of the different needs of various groups affected by radon, the value of targeting information specifically to meet audience needs has become clearer. A householder in a radon Affected Area needs different information from a council officer or a Radiation Protection Adviser.

This distinction immediately suggests the provision of information at different levels and in different formats. The table below distinguishes between three different groups and two levels of detail for each group.

The literature provided must recognise the different levels of background knowledge of the audience, which will generally be higher for professional groups than householders or employers. Providing the right level of detail becomes more important where test results are positive, as occupiers are then more likely to ask about risk levels, remediation and legal obligations. Local authorities are often the first point of contact for a wide variety of groups, and may find guidance on the use and suitability of information sources useful.

As part of the HPA-RPD programme to target and distribute appropriate radon information to interested parties, particularly in other divisions of the wider HPA, folders of information are being issued to meet the needs of specific groups. Selection of the content for these folders, and indeed for any information packs, is assisted by reference to the table.

Group	Initial information	Further information
Public, small employers, estate agents, solicitors, etc	<p>General radon fold-out leaflet</p> <p>Leaflet with detector order form for home or workplace</p> <p>Frequently Asked Questions about radon*</p>	<p>Remedial methods chart</p> <p>List of radon weblinks</p> <p>Householder's Guide to Radon or Radon at Work broadsheet</p>
Council officers, surveyors, home inspectors, journalists, etc	<p>'Radon – reducing risks by minimising exposure'. Health Protection Matters 4, 16-18.</p> <p>'Understanding radon sources and mitigation in buildings'. Journal of Building Appraisal, 1, 164-176</p>	<p>Householder's Guide to Radon or Radon at Work broadsheet</p> <p>Summary sheet on radon services for employers</p>
Specialist council staff, safety advisers, policy makers, etc	<p>Note on radon from Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology*</p> <p>Press release for European pooling epidemiological study</p>	<p>Health Risks from Radon booklet</p> <p>Articles from Environmental Radon Newsletter*</p> <p>Reports from HPA-RPD technical report series</p>

* Available on HPA-RPD or other website

For copies of other materials, contact radon@hpa.org.uk

UK Radon Forum 2006

Fero Ibrahimi, Health Protection Agency, fero.ibrahimi@hpa.org.uk

The 2006 UK radon forum was hosted by the Health Protection Agency's Radiation Protection Division (HPA-RPD), and attended by 87 people from around the UK. Ian Chell (Department of Health, DH) began the day with the excellent news that the DH had agreed to continuing funding of the UK government's radon programme, coordinated through HPA-RPD. The new programme will include money to pay for remediation of some homes with extremely high radon concentrations, as well as a revamp of the radon website to improve public awareness.

Gerry Kendall (University of Oxford, formerly HPA-RPD) described the radon work of the HPA's independent Advisory Group on Ionising Radiation. A subgroup on Radon Epidemiology is currently reviewing the latest evidence of the effects of radon exposure on the health of the UK population. The subgroup is carrying out a detailed investigation of the cost-effectiveness of preventing or reducing high radon exposures, and comparing the costs to those of other health measures.

Martyn Green (HPA-RPD) described an independent audit that Dr Yimmy Chow is undertaking of the HPA's radon programme in England. She is evaluating and identifying the main factors of the radon programme which are associated with positive outcomes, to achieve greater health equity within the programme. Her report is due to be published in 2007.

Jon Miles (HPA-RPD) gave an account of the radon work being undertaken by the World Health Organisation. WHO estimate 70,000 fatal lung cancers each year are due to radon exposure across the world. In 2005 it began a two-year international project to develop a radon handbook and guidance to assist countries to address radon problems.

A session on radon in the workplace included talks by Daryl Dixon (HPA-RPD) and Gareth Thomas (Health and Safety Executive, HSE). Daryl Dixon informed the meeting that around 160,000 employees are at risk of lung cancer from occupational exposure to radon, and there are more employees receiving radiation doses of 2 mSv or more from radon than from work in the nuclear industry.

Gareth Thomas spoke about the recent HSE radon initiatives, including a new National Enforcement Strategy which has a target of 50% of workplaces to be assessed for radon risk in radon affected areas by 2010. The strategy includes co-ordination between the HSE and local authority Building Inspectors, joint Trades Union initiatives, as well as encouraging professional bodies to raise radon as an important issue in radon Affected Areas.

Jon Miles (HPA-RPD) gave the forum an update on the new UK radon map which has an expected publishing date of around April 2007. The map will be available as an indicative radon atlas and as a digital data set for access through a website and for use in Geographical Information Systems.

Richard Shipman (Department for Communities and Local Government) discussed whether radon preventive measures should be applied more widely than at present, or applied in all new buildings. He encouraged the audience to make their views and other issues known, not just to himself, but also to their MPs.

Caron Walker (Northumberland Care Trust) and Steve Cleworth (Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council) gave a presentation on the very successful work of the North Northumberland Radon Partnership in the radon roll-out programme. More than 60% of homes in the target area have been now been tested and about 15% of testers above the Action Level are actively pursuing remediation so far. The Partnership's hard work has directly led to higher take up rates of testing and higher likelihood of remediation after receiving results. The secrets of success according to Caron and Steve are:

- Engaging community groups in the programme
- Obtaining endorsement by local GPs
- Finding locally respected individuals to champion the programme
- Providing a good website and free-phone telephone number for public information
- Allowing plenty of time and maintaining momentum throughout the programme

Mark Newman (North Wiltshire District Council) gave the last talk of the day. He has begun a research project in which he will be contacting local authorities in England and Wales to identify how they can best increase radon remediation in their area. He aims to identify best practice in arrangements for local grant availability since the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 was introduced.

HPA-RPD asked those attending to complete a questionnaire about the forum. Responders were particularly appreciative of the talk by Steve Cleworth and Caron Walker on their successful partnership approach to the radon roll-out programme, and Marytn Green's talk on the evaluation of the HPA radon programme.

If you would like to be notified of the details of the next UK radon forum, please write to radon@hpa.org.uk or telephone 01235 822622.

Editor
Jon Miles
jon.miles@hpa-rp.org.uk

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