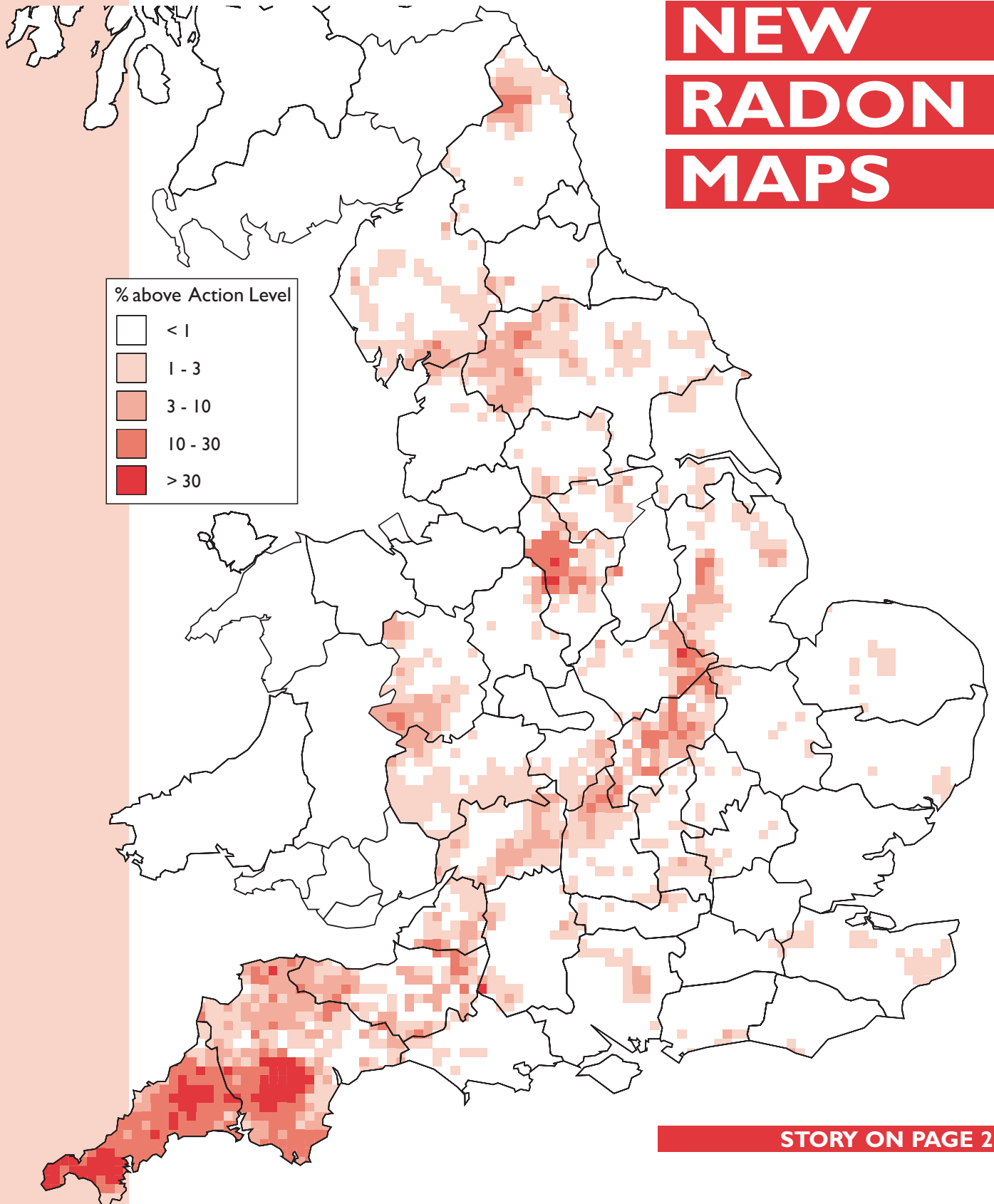


Environmental **Radon** Newsletter

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NEW RADON MAPS



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POINTS OF CONTACT

Building Research Establishment (BRE)
Garston, Watford, WD2 7JR
BRE Radon Hot Line:
Telephone: 01923-664707
Fax: 01923 664010

National Radiological Protection Board
Radon Survey,
Chilton, Didcot, OX11 0RQ
Radon Freephone: 0800 614529.
Fax: 01235 833891

Department of the Environment
Room A518, Romney House
43 Marsham Street,
London, SW1P 3PY
Telephone: 0171 276 8825
Fax: 0171 276 8909

Welsh Office
Housing Division
Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF1 3NQ
Telephone: 01222 825219
Fax: 01222 825391

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

Scottish Office Development Department
Housing Division 1
First Floor East, Victoria Quay
Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ
Telephone: 0131 244 0131
Fax: 0131 244 0153

Health and Safety Executive
Nuclear Safety Division F1
Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge
London, SE1 9HF
Telephone: 0171 717 6000
Fax: 0171 717 6717

Radon South West Committee
Secretary
c/o Environmental Health
Teignbridge District Council
Forde House, Newton Abbott,
Devon, TQ12 4XX

Steering Group on Radon
(Northamptonshire and elsewhere)
c/o Environmental Health Department
Borough Council of Wellingborough
Chess Board House,
20 Sheep Street, Wellingborough,
Northampton, NN8 1BL

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
Telephone: 01932 221212
Fax: 01932 229779

Somerset Radon Campaign Steering Group
c/o Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Deane House, Belvedere Road
Taunton, Somerset, TAI 1HE

New Radon Maps

Jon Miles, National Radiological Protection Board

NRPB has published new maps of radon in all of England and parts of Wales*. They are based on radon measurements in nearly 250,000 houses, mostly funded by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office. The map of England updates and completes earlier publications on radon in Cornwall and Devon (1990) and Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Somerset (1992). NRPB has also previously advised on radon in parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland in 1993.

The information shown in the maps is the estimated proportion of homes above the UK Action Level for radon (200 Bq m⁻³). The study confirmed that 80% of the homes above the Action Level are likely to be found in the areas mapped earlier, and only 20% in the new areas.

Some of the newly identified areas, such as in Avon, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, are underlain by the same Jurassic rock formation that causes high levels in Northamptonshire. Others in Shropshire, North Yorkshire and Cumbria are in areas not previously recognised as likely to have radon problems.

The Silurian geology which causes high radon levels in Shropshire also does so over the Welsh border in what was called Radnorshire before the Local Authorities were reorganised. High radon levels were also found in parts of Pembrokeshire, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Anglesey.

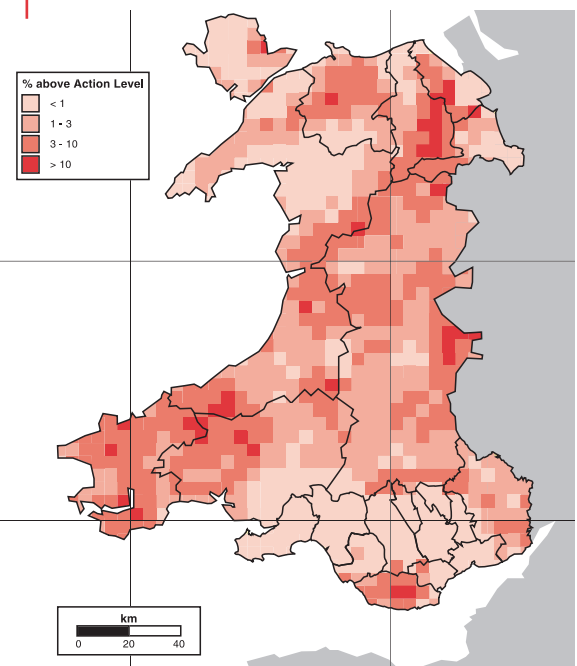
Householders in the original radon affected areas have been provided with free measurements in a series of Government publicity campaigns. NRPB has used its large database of results to identify

those homes in the new affected areas in England which are most likely to be above the Action Level. Invitations to have free radon measurements have been sent to some 100,000 of these houses.

In Wales it is intended that a programme of measurements to continue the mapping of the whole of the principality will be under way shortly. The householders most at risk in the affected areas mapped so far will also be offered free radon measurements.

Householders in any part of the UK who are concerned about radon can obtain a free information pack from NRPB. They should write or telephone the NRPB Freephone (0800 614 529). In areas where a free radon measurement is not available, the same service can be obtained by payment of a small fee (ú36.19 inclusive of VAT and all post and packing). There are significant discounts for surveys organised by local authorities.

*Radon Affected Areas: England, Wales. *Documents of the NRPB*, volume 7 number 2, 1996. HMSO, £5.00. (ISBN 0-85951-396-3).



Action Needed to Prevent Deaths from Radon

Graham Jukes, Director of Professional Services, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

Previous surveys carried out by the CIEH have indicated the potential existence of radon outside those areas which had already been identified. The publication of these maps highlights the government's former complacency and vindicates the view of the CIEH of the need for an urgent strategy to deal with this real public health issue.

It is estimated that 2,500 deaths from lung cancer are directly attributable to radon exposure and positive action is now required to identify and assist affected homes to carry out remedial work. In view of the public health significance, the CIEH questions whether it is

enough for the government to merely invite homes within affected areas to be part of the radon measurement exercise.

Mandatory assistance should be available to all homeowners with levels of radon above 200 Bq m⁻³ in order that they can take remedial action. The government has a responsibility to devise a measure which forces owners who are selling their homes to take the necessary action in order that they do not pass the problem on to the buyers and thus perpetuate the public health risk.

The New Affected Areas

Mark Taylor, Principal EHO, North Kesteven District Council

Radon in Lincolnshire had not been surveyed in detail when Northamptonshire was declared a radon affected area in 1992. But North Kesteven is on similar geology to Northamptonshire, and the District Council were already aware that there could be a problem of radon in its area, as in 1991 notification was received of a single result above the Action Level. Since that time a programme of public meetings and encouragement of monitoring in geologically suspect areas has resulted in around 3,500 properties being tested, with 350 results above the Action Level.

Thus, when the NRPB radon map finally appeared on 16th May, it was no surprise that parts of the Council's area had been designated as affected. Although we received the details of the national survey results some time after the first press enquiry was received, we were in the relatively fortunate position of broadly expecting the results. In total 68% of the dwellings in the District are in radon affected areas.

Publication of the new radon map raised a number of issues for the Council to consider:

CONCERN FOR PUBLIC REACTION

Although the Council has had a policy of openness ever since the problem first arose there was concern that the latest information should be revealed in a manner which was not likely to cause undue public concern, whilst not underplaying the problem so that the public would not take any action. The policy adopted was to increase the information available gradually, ending in the presentation of a report, with map, to the Council's Housing and the Environment Committee.

COUNCIL DWELLINGS

A number of questions arose with respect to the Council's own properties.

- ◆ How could we promote uptake of free testing by Council tenants in the 10 - 30% risk band, and could the Council arrange free testing en bloc?
- ◆ What policy was to be taken regarding testing Council dwellings in the lower risk bands? To test these properties would cost £82,000.
- ◆ How could the estimated costs of remedial measures of £273,000 be afforded?

BUILDING CONTROL

Houses incorporating no radon preventative measures have continued to be built in the areas we knew to have problems. Were we now in a position to insist on such measures being taken?

RENOVATION GRANTS

The question of grant aid towards remedial works has frequently been raised by members of the public and has been considered by the Council on several occasions. Should we now reconsider our policy of not offering renovation grant aid?

Thus the Council has been faced with a number of issues have been raised in the first few weeks following the publication of the NRPB report. We have made some important policy decisions: for instance, we have decided to phase in testing of Council properties, testing the 3 - 10% band in 1997/98 and the 1- 3% band in 1998/99, if resources allow. Other questions remain to be resolved, and the radon issue will continue to challenge us for some time to come.

DoE Research Contract

Dealing with radon emissions in new development

The Department of the Environment has placed a research contract to identify the circumstances where new development may be adversely affected by radon and to recommend appropriate responses. The contract was awarded to the British Geological Survey in collaboration with the Building Research Establishment, Land Use Consultants and the National Radiological Protection Board. The research will take two years and will cover planning and building control issues, mapping procedures and remedial measures. There will be three regional seminars to allow discussion of draft findings and guidance.

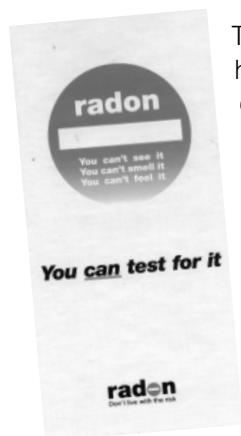
The objectives of the research are.

- ◆ to identify the circumstances where new development or changes to land use may result in

people being exposed to radon emissions which are prejudicial to health or are above the action level

- ◆ to consider what information is required to enable such radon risks to be assessed and precautions to be targeted more effectively, and how this should be collected, collated and presented
- ◆ to examine what options, including preventive and remedial measures, are available to prevent adverse accumulations of radon within new development
- ◆ to present results in forms suitable for both specialists and non-specialists in issues associated with radon

New Radon Guides



The Department of the Environment has replaced its booklet *Householders Guide to Radon* with a series of three coordinated booklets focusing on specific issues:

Radon - a guide for homebuyers and sellers

Radon - a householder's guide

Radon - a guide to reducing levels in your home

There is also a leaflet,

Radon - you can test for it, which

briefly explains the risks and how to obtain a measurement.

Free copies can be obtained by writing to:

The Department of the Environment
Publications Despatch Centre
Blackhorse Road
London SE99 6TT



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future issues should be sent to Jon Miles at NRPB (see address on page 2). The views expressed in the contributions here are not necessarily those of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Royal Environmental Health Institute for Scotland or the National Radiological Protection Board.