

THE RADON COUNCIL

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DCLG Procrastination Could Cost Lives; Radon Council Calls for early action

The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has suggested¹ it will not be making amendments to the Building Regulations with regards to radon protection until 2013. Estimates suggest that radon kills over 2000 people a year in the UK², and The Radon Council consider this delay will allow avoidable deaths to continue.

The Government conducted a series of consultation meetings in January 2009 and proposed a revision strategy of the Building Regulations to be announced in July³. The intention being to introduce changes into the building regulations in 2010.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and others have recommended that all new buildings should include basic radon protection i.e. a radon gas barrier (membrane) across the footprint of the building⁴. This advice has been supported by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) and a multitude of academic and medical research papers.⁵ Other countries have already adopted this standard procedure⁶.

The Radon Council is of the opinion that the current Building Regulation guidance with regard to radon is inadequate. Chairman Brian Ahern said that, "if the delay comes into effect, homes that constitute a threat to health could unfortunately continue to be built for a further three years."

Mr Ahern commented, "The Council recognises the need for a cohesive building control system, and welcomes any changes that will make the process simpler for designers and architects to follow correctly. It is bitterly disappointing however that crucial amendments are being postponed to fit in with the Document's newly timetabled revision date. It is in the public health interest to make this amendment as soon as possible in order to start to reduce risks to public health. DCLG have an abundance of information to support the amendment of the Regulations to require radon protection in all new properties and the proposed delay is a matter of regret."

Mr Ahern continued, "In addition to the advice from the HPA, the World Health Organisation has also recently advised that all new dwellings should be built with radon protection. In their Radon Handbook, WHO also state that the responsibility for indoor radon levels lies with designers specifiers and other property professionals⁷. This in itself in an increasingly litigious world should be enough to persuade them to ensure that the effective action regarding radon protection is implemented without further delay."

In a bid to limit the number of properties built with insufficient radon protection, The Radon Council has published its own guidance document. The document details the current best practice not only for radon protection in new buildings but also for radon mitigation in existing buildings. The document is available at www.radoncouncil.org

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References

1. In September 2009, DCLG published the 'Future of Building Control Implementation Plan' (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1320090>)
2. The Health & Safety Executive acknowledge that approximately 2000 people in the UK die from lung cancer linked to radon exposure each year (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/radiation/ionising/radon.htm>)
3. 'Review of Part A & C of the Building Regulations' public consultation meetings were held in Watford, Bristol and Manchester
4. BRE definition <http://www.bre.co.uk/radon/answers3.html#Anch6A3>
5. The Health Protection Agency issued a press release on 21st May 2008 stating that they would be advising Government that all new buildings should be built with radon protection, regardless of geographic location
http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1211354081428?p=1204186170287

Gray, A., Read, S., McGale, P., and Darby, S., *Lung cancer deaths from indoor radon and the cost effectiveness and potential of policies to reduce them*, BMJ, 6 January 2009
6. For example, in Ireland the Technical Guidance Document C: Site Preparation and Resistance to Moisture of the Building Regulations (1997) requires all new dwellings to 'be provided with a potential means of extracting radon...should that prove necessary..'
7. Highlights of WHO Handbook on Indoor Radon
http://www.aarst.org/images/US_Highlights_WHO_Rn_Handbook.pdf,

Briefing Notes for Editors

Government initiatives to generate awareness of the risk commenced in 1987. In May 2008, the Health Protection Agency (HPA – Government advisor on public health protection) announced publicly their recommendation that every new building in the UK should incorporate radon protection measures.

In January 2009, eminent work by Gray *et al* was published in the British Medical Journal reinforcing the need for radon protection measures in every newbuild and demonstrating the cost effectiveness of doing so.

Approved Document C in the Building Regulations is the current guidance given on radon for newbuild.

In December 2008, DCLG announced a review of the Building Regulations, indicating that HPA advice would be incorporated. The exercise was to have been concluded and published in July 2009.

In September 2009, DCLG issued publication 'Future of Building Control Implementation Plan' (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1320090>)

The Ministerial foreword to the 'Future of Building Control Implementation Plan' document is by Lord McKenzie of Luton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State. Page 8 of the

document contains the statement “Our vision is for a building control system which ensures buildings are safe, healthy, accessible and sustainable for current and future generations.”

The document proceeds on page 19 to defer implementation of radon protection measures by alteration of Approved Document C until 2013. The reason given is the need to take onboard “full implications”. It is believed by the Radon Council that adequate information is already in the public domain to support alterations without undue delay.

General Notes for Editors:

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas, formed in the ground during the decay of uranium, which is present in all rocks and soils. When the gas reaches the surface in an open space, it is quickly diluted to harmless concentrations, however if the gas surfaces into an enclosed space, (i.e. a building) it can build to a potentially harmful concentration.

The Radon Council came into being in 1990 in response to a request contained in the Interim Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Indoor Pollution, which called upon industry to provide a solution to the radon problem. It is the Independent non-profit making Self-Regulatory Body for the radon industry.

The Radon Council’s website www.radoncouncil.org contains additional information on radon.

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