

A silent killer: Just 10% of UK adults have heard of radon, yet thousands of houses contain potentially dangerous radon levels

- In the run-up to Radon Awareness Week, a new survey has revealed only 10% of British adults are aware of radon gas, despite a 2016 study finding that 69,500 UK houses that had been tested had radon levels at or above the action level
- Radon exposure is one of the leading causes of lung cancer in the UK, after smoking, with 1,100 deaths being linked to radon each year*
- Over half (60%) of households are not concerned about the threat of radon exposure

Recent research has revealed that the vast majority of the population have never heard of radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is tasteless, colourless and odourless, which could be leaking into homes from the ground without residents being aware of it. A new survey conducted by the team at the UK Radon Association found that just 10% of UK adults are aware of radon. However, a Government report published in 2016, stated that tens of thousands of UK homes were affected by high radon levels. Between 1980 and 2016, just 3% of all UK homes had been tested yet 69,500 homes were found to have radon levels equal to or above the current action level of 200 becquerels per cubic metre (Bq/m³) – the level at which action should be taken to reduce levels of the gas. Whilst it is likely that many of these homeowners have since carried out remedial works to reduce the radon concentration, with the overwhelming majority of UK homes having never been tested, and new homes being constructed all the time, the overall number of homes containing high radon levels is likely to be in the tens, if not hundreds, of thousands.

The survey, which involved over 3,500 individuals in the UK, all of whom are either homeowners or have been renting for more than a year, revealed that only one in ten participants were aware of what radon is or where it comes from. This is in line with the most recent Annual Report on Air Pollution from Dr. Chris Witty, Chief Medical Officer for England**, who stated that “most people don’t even know what it is. That’s why it’s so important to raise awareness about radon and encourage people to test their homes.”

What’s more, when participants were asked how concerned they were about radon gas in their home on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not concerned at all, and 5 being incredibly concerned), the responses were found to be:

- 1 - 34%
- 2 - 26%
- 3 - 17%
- 4 - 15%
- 5 - 8%

Respondents were also asked if they had tested for radon before moving into their homes. Over nine in ten (92%) of participants had not tested for radon prior to moving into their homes.

By way of contrast, 93% of UK households have a smoke alarm** and fatalities from home fires are now around 200 per year***.

Participants were also asked if they were aware of the health risks associated with high amounts of radon exposure, to which a shocking 98% said that they weren’t. This lack of knowledge surrounding the dangers of radon gas by UK homeowners is a growing concern, with radon gas being responsible

for an estimated 1100 cases of lung cancer deaths across the country each year, making it the second leading cause of cancer***. [Radon Awareness Week](#), taking place from 6th to 12th November, aims to tackle this lack of information by explaining what radon is, how to test for it and how to reduce levels if you find you've got radon in your home.

Lastly, when asked if more could be done to raise awareness about the dangers of high exposure to radon, over two thirds (68%) said yes, while 28% believed that enough is being done and 4% were unsure, suggesting that there is public demand for more education about radon gas.

Maria Dugdale, Chairman at www.radonassociation.co.uk commented:

"Radon gas is a silent killer; it's one of the leading causes of lung cancer, after smoking, accounting for over 1,000 lung cancer deaths in the UK each year, and yet most people don't even know what it is. It's shocking that only one in ten people had heard of the gas, and even more shocking, in my opinion, that most of those we questioned were not concerned about its presence in their homes. We must not let it become the next asbestos, with the public asking, 'why didn't we know how bad it was for us sooner?' It's imperative that, with the support of organisations and experts in the field, the Government works to increase awareness of radon gas, encourages radon testing and gives guidance on how homeowners can combat high levels in their property if they're detected.

"During Radon Awareness Week, we're urging people to test their homes for radon and take steps to reduce their exposure if necessary. It's a simple and affordable way to protect your health and the wellbeing of your loved ones."

ENDS

Sources:

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