



By Appointment

To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Damp Proofing and Timber Treatment Specialists
ProTen Services Ltd., Bath

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Searing attack launched on new British Standard: “Death traps will be created”

The newly published revision of BS 8102: 2009, ‘Code of Practice for protection of below ground structures from water from the ground’ has been met with stinging criticism amid suggestions that following the advice in the new Standard will allow the creation of dangerous living spaces and workplaces.

The new version of the Code includes a requirement to take account of radon, among other things. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas formed in the ground during the decay of uranium. It can enter buildings and if high concentrations are allowed to accumulate, it poses a significant risk to the building’s occupants. Over 2000 people in the UK die from lung cancer linked to radon exposure every year. Radon is odourless and colourless, and unless a special test is conducted to detect its presence, occupants will never know if they are at risk. The Government’s advisor on radon, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) has advised that all basements may be susceptible to high levels of radon, regardless of geographic location.

Martin Freeman, Managing Director of leading radon specialist ProTen Services, said that “while it is to be congratulated that the danger of radon has been recognised in the new Standard, it is unacceptable that the document goes on to give defective guidance that will allow the creation of potential death traps. During the consultation process of the new Standard, the Committee was advised that their intended guidance was defective and was given accurate information. The Committee chose to ignore that advice, and have proceeded to issue their defective guidance. “

Defects in the guidance given include limiting protective action to certain geographic areas and advocating the use of materials and methods that are known to have high levels of failure.

In September 2009, the World Health Organisation published The Radon Handbook: A Public Health Perspective. This document stated that indoor radon levels are not naturally occurring and are a result of the way that properties are constructed and used. WHO have now made it clear that responsibility for dangerous levels of radon in buildings lies with building code officials, designers, contractors and other property professionals. Says Mr Freeman, “Following the defective British Standard will lead designers and installers of below-ground waterproofing systems to create hazardous living and working spaces, leaving them exposed to potential litigation.”

The utilisation of basements is an excellent way of maximising the use of a site and enhancing property value, and they can easily be designed with safety in mind. Mr Freeman is urging people to ignore the defective guidance in the Standard regarding the management of radon, but to consult a suitably qualified radon specialist in all instances where basement waterproofing is proposed.

-ENDS-

For further information, please contact:

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Notes to Editors

- BS 8102: 2009 Code of Practice for protection of below ground structures against water from the ground, *BSI, ISBN 978 0 580 59399 4*
- WHO Handbook On Indoor Radon: A Public Health Perspective, *World Health Organisation, 2009, ISBN 978 82 4 154767 3*
- “From data collected in workplaces it is clear that basements have a higher radon potential than ground floors, and that high radon concentrations can be found in basements anywhere in the country, regardless of Affected Area Status.” *Tracey Gooding, HPA, Environmental Radon Newsletter Issue 53, Winter 2007.*