

Risk of radon and crisis of communication

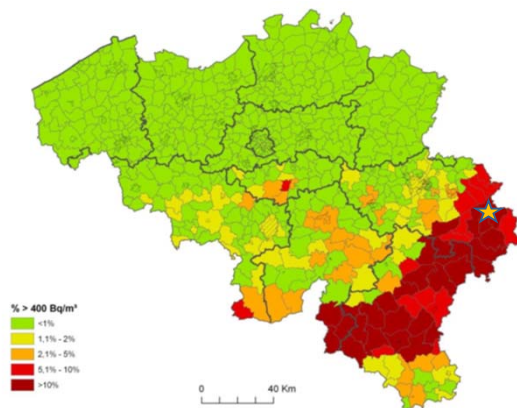
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MAIN POINTS

1. A question : can we speak of « radon crisis » in Belgium?
2. A case study : a radon « event » in a public school
3. Crisis communication **and** risk management
4. Who is in charge ... really ?

RADON RISK EVALUATION : A FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY



→ « Concerning radon concentrations indoors, the average concentration in Belgium is estimated at 46 Bq/m³ (FANC 2018)

→ The main cause of high radon concentrations in (the Southern part of) Belgium is the soil and its rock substratum. (SHC 2017)

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RADON RISK EVALUATION : A FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY

Exposure data is the result of empirical measurement

Risk estimation is the output of a mathematical model

Both are performed at the federal level for the whole territory with the support of institutional agencies

FANC

« website communication »

Superior Health Council

2017 report on IAQ, including radon

Classification is organised by institutions and they give a form to knowledge and to risk representation at the level of the territory.

Les dispositifs de gouvernement contribuent à stabiliser le processus de catégorisation :

« les gens font les institutions, les institutions font les classifications, les classifications modèlent les actions, les actions appellent des norms, et les gens, ou d'autres créatures répondent à ces norms, positivement ou négativement » (Douglas 2004: 146).

CASE STUDY : LOCAL MEASUREMENTS WITHIN A FEDERAL MEASUREMENT PROGRAM

All public sites to be tested : are OK

Except for a small school where radon levels required action (according to the normative framework) :

- primary class (12 children – 6-10 years) 1248 Bq/m³
- preps class (15 children – 2-6 years) 400 Bq/m³



CASE STUDY : LOCAL ACTIONS BY THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES



Know (head of PAs; local authorities)

Do : Actions have been decided asap :

- Find a reference expert : *where are the professionals ?*
- Air extraction in the basement

- VMC system in the main class (2 months delay)

- Control

90 Bq/m³

CASE STUDY : COMMUNICATION WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Care & Share

- Internal administration (professionals; part of the political-administrative system)
- Teachers (professionals & ... PA ?)

→ And with the parents ?

How to control communication ? Avoiding bypassing by the media



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RISK = HAZARD + OUTRAGE → ACTION (SANDMAN)

During the crisis communication period, the two dimensions are not always in line : the approach attempts to examine both cognitive and affective responses, related to anger, suspicion, fear, distrust, and contempt.

OUTRAGE = “cultural seriousness of a risk”

- ← Event specific reactions
- ← Communication specific reactions (seriousness, agency, responsiveness,...)

Who to blame ? This is problematic in sensemaking dynamics because

There is a plurality of **values**

There is a plurality of **trust** level towards local authorities

There is a plurality of **agendas** (for further action)

→ **POLITICS matters**

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RADON RISK MANAGEMENT : WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY ?

“For the southern part of the country, reducing the average exposure of the population to radon can be achieved by radon prevention in new buildings and measurements and mitigation in existing buildings.” (CSS 2017)

Product regulation = the federal Authority

Internal Air Quality = the Region

Health prevention = the Community

Public Health protection = the local authority → public information about a local risk

→ **POLITY matters**

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IN CONCLUSION ...

Radon risk management in Belgium is organised at the federal level but exposure is local ...

→ Local case studies are still usefull to recall the plurality of reception, interaction, sensemaking and action

Politics still matters

→ Local case studies are interesting for analysing local interactions and the problems faced by the participants and stakeholders : which are the trustfull professionals necessary to support public action ?

Polity also matters

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