

Radioactive Contaminated Land - Briefing Note 2

An Overview of Land Contaminated with Radioactive Substances

All soil and rocks are radioactive due to the presence of naturally occurring radioactive substances such as uranium, thorium, radium and radon gas. Where radioactive substances have been introduced into or onto land as a consequence of human activities, we say that land is 'contaminated with radioactivity'. See Briefing Note 1 for information on potential sources of radioactive contamination.

In certain cases the risks posed by land contaminated with radioactivity need managing. How this happens depends on its particular circumstances:

- *Developing Land Contaminated with Radioactivity* – where land contaminated with radioactivity is going to be developed it's the responsibility of the developer to control the risks to occupants and users of the proposed development [see Briefing Note 3].
- *Contaminated Land Regime (Part 2A) and Radioactivity* – where the current use of land contaminated with radioactivity gives rise to prolonged exposure to humans above certain levels, that land may be determined as "radioactive contaminated land" by the local authority. The "appropriate person", or in certain cases the Environment Agency, is then required to undertake the necessary remediation (clean up) [see Briefing Note 4].
- *Land Contaminated with Radioactivity on Nuclear Licensed Sites* – this land is regulated by the Health and Safety Executive (Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, NII) under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 [see Briefing Note 5].
- *Land Contaminated with Radioactivity and the Radioactive Substances Act 1993* – remediating land contaminated with radioactivity is likely to involve the accumulation and subsequent disposal of radioactive waste. This must be authorised by us before the work starts [see Briefing Note 6].
- *Voluntary Remediation (Clean up) of Land Contaminated with Radioactivity* – in some cases the owner of land contaminated with radioactivity may believe there are benefits to removing the contamination and may wish to clean the site up voluntarily [see Briefing Note 7].

In these Briefing Notes we use the expression *land contaminated with radioactivity* to refer to land into, or onto which radioactive substances have been introduced as a consequence of man's activities.

The term *radioactive contaminated land* refers to the special case of land that is determined as Contaminated Land under the extension of the Part 2A Regime as it is causing harm or there is a significant possibility of such harm being caused. Harm is defined as “lasting exposure resulting from the after effects of a radiological emergency, past practice or past work activity”. This is discussed in Briefing Note 4.