

Boarding school fined £50,000 after pupils overexposed to radon radioactive gas

A private boarding school has been fined £50,000 after exposing two employees, five pupils, and two other children to high levels of radioactive radon gas.

Five pupils at Kingswood School in Bath, Somerset were exposed to levels of radioactive radon gas almost 8 times the legal limit. Two other children, who were not pupils at the school, were exposed to levels of radon gas almost 14 times the legal limit. Two employees were exposed to radioactive radon gas $\frac{3}{4}$ of the legal limit. Exposures to radiation need to be kept as low as reasonably practicable.

The radioactive gas radon is a hazard in many homes and workplaces and breathing in radon is the second largest cause of lung cancer in the UK resulting in over 1,000 fatal cancers per year. Radon is a colourless, odourless, radioactive gas that occurs in rocks and soils, some building materials and water. The ground is the most important source as radon can seep out and build up in houses and indoor workplaces like schools.

The legal limits for radiation exposure in the workplace are defined in [The Ionising Radiations Regulations 2017 \(IRR17\)](#).

These exposures to radioactive radon gas occurred in 2019. The two employees and their two children were exposed to the elevated radon gas levels as a result of working and living at the school. The five overexposed pupils studied and lived at the school during this time.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the school knew they had a radon problem as far back as 2007 when they carried out monitoring and installed some remediation to reduce radon levels. However, from 2010 to 2018 the school carried out no subsequent radon monitoring and had no systems in place to ensure radon control measures were adequate. Only following HSE intervention in 2018 did the school find out about their previous radon problem and further radon monitoring and remediation was carried out to reduce radon levels.

Kingswood School Trustees Limited, of Lansdown, Bath, Somerset pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The company was fined £50,000 and was ordered to pay £19,222 costs at a hearing at Taunton Magistrates' Court on 19 July 2023.

After the hearing, HSE Principal Specialist Inspector (Radiation) Stewart Robertson, said: "The fine imposed on Kingswood School Trustees Limited should underline to everyone in the education sector that the courts, and HSE, take a failure to follow the regulations extremely seriously."

“We will not hesitate to take action against companies, including schools, who do not do all that they should to keep people safe. Every workplace needs to consider radon as a risk to its employees and others.”

Notes to editors:

1. The [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise.
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [L121 – Work with ionising radiation: Approved Code of Practice and guidance \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)
3. HSE has guidance on assessing radon risk in the workplace: [Radon in the workplace \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)
4. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.