

Radon Causes 100 Times More Deaths than Carbon Monoxide Poisoning - EPA Launches National Radon Action Month

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Lansing, MI - December 9, 2008 -- Jamey J. Gelina, President of Air Quality Control, the Nation's largest radon gas mitigation and engineering agency is reminding the media that National Radon Action Month is quickly approaching. Updated press releases from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Office of the Surgeon General will most likely be launched in January, but this is an early reminder to promote the upcoming awareness campaigns. Mr. Gelina along with others in the radon and indoor air quality industries encourages the media not to wait until January to begin awareness efforts that could prevent needless cancer deaths throughout the United States.

EPA has designated January as National Radon Action Month, a time when state radon programs and other partners conduct special radon outreach activities and events across the country. The aim of National Radon Action Month is to increase the public's awareness of radon, promote radon testing and mitigation, and advance the use of radon-resistant new construction practices.

In 2005, The U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona warned the American public about the risks of breathing indoor radon by issuing a national health advisory. The advisory is meant to urge Americans to prevent this silent radioactive gas from seeping into their homes and building up to dangerous levels. Dr. Carmona issued the advisory during a two-day Surgeon General's Workshop on Healthy Indoor Environment.

"Indoor radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and breathing it over prolonged periods can present a significant health risk to families all over the county," Dr. Carmona said. "It's important to know that this threat is completely preventable. Radon can be detected with a simple test and fixed through well-established venting techniques."

Radon is an invisible, odorless and tasteless gas, with no immediate health symptoms, that comes from the breakdown of uranium inside the earth. Simple test kits can reveal the amount of radon in any building. Those with high levels can be fixed with simple and affordable venting techniques. According to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates, one in every 15 homes nationwide have a high radon level at or above the recommended radon action level of 4 picoCuries (pCi/L) per liter of air.

National Health Advisory on Radon

Radon gas in the indoor air of America's homes poses a serious health risk. More than 20,000 Americans die of radon-related lung cancer every year. Millions of homes have an elevated radon level. If you also smoke, your risk of lung cancer is much higher. Test your home for radon every two years, and retest any time you move, make structural changes to your home, or occupy a previously unused level of a house. If you have a radon level of 4 pCi/L or more, take steps to remedy the problem as soon as possible.

"Americans need to know about the risks of indoor radon and have the information and tools they need to take action. That's why EPA is actively promoting the Surgeon General's advice urging all Americans to get their homes tested for radon. If families do find elevated levels in their homes, they can take inexpensive steps that will reduce exposure to this risk," said Jeffrey R. Holmstead, Assistant Administrator, Office of Air and Radiation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"Based on national averages, we can expect that many of the homes owned or financed by federal government programs would have potentially elevated radon levels. The federal government has an opportunity to lead by example on this public health risk. We can accomplish this by using the outreach and awareness avenues we have, such as EPA's Web site, to share information and encourage action on radon to reduce risks," said Edwin Piñero, Federal Environmental Executive, Office of the Federal Environmental Executive (OFEE).

A national Public Service Announcement (PSA) that was released to television stations across America is reinforcing this recently updated health advisory. In the television spot, the camera scans a neighborhood with rooftop banners that remind the occupants of the importance to test their homes for radon. The television PSA can be viewed at: <http://www.epa.gov/radon/rnpsa.html>.

-- Breathing home indoor radon causes nearly one hundred times more deaths each year than carbon monoxide poisoning.

-- Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking.

-- Some 20,000 people will die this year due to breathing too much radon without even knowing it.

Responding to this danger, EPA is joining state, local, and tribal governments, community groups, public health organizations, and industry in designating January as National Radon Action Month, to raise public awareness and promote actions reducing these risks.

"In our national drive to reduce greenhouse gases by making our homes greener, we shouldn't forget that they can't truly be green without being safe places for people to live," said Marcus Peacock, EPA's deputy administrator. "It's remarkably easy to protect

our loved ones by testing for radon and building new homes with radon-resistant features that allow everyone to breathe freely and safely."

As part of Radon Action Month, EPA has released a public service announcements featuring Fuad Reveiz, a member of the National Association of Home Builders and former NFL Pro Bowl place-kicker.

"It's simple and cost-effective to build new homes with radon-resistant features," said Reveiz. "It makes sense to do it right from the start."

Radon is an invisible radioactive gas that seeps into homes undetected through foundation cracks, and can reach harmful levels if trapped indoors. It travels up from underground sources of uranium in the earth's crust. EPA estimates that one in 15 homes will have a radon level of four PicoCuries per liter (pCi/L) of air or more, a level the agency considers high.

The radon threat is preventable with some simple steps. In existing homes, families can begin protecting themselves by buying an easy-to-use radon test kit to determine if a high level exists; if so, a high level might be lowered simply with a straight-forward radon venting system installed by a contractor. In new homes, builders can easily and economically include radon-resistant features during construction, and home buyers should ask for these. EPA also recommends that home buyers ask their builder to test for radon gas before they move in.

Radon preventive actions have saved an estimated 6,000 lives in the last 20 years. EPA has a goal to double that number, to 12,000 lives saved, in the next five years. All Americans can contribute to saving someone's life by testing and reducing high levels in existing homes or testing and building radon-resistant new homes.

As part of an effort called Radon Leaders Saving Lives, EPA is working with state and local governments, non-profit organizations, and radon professionals across the country to educate consumers about ways to reduce radon in existing and new homes. Moreover, everyone can be a radon leader and help save a life by telling a friend or neighbor about preventing lung cancer from breathing radon.

For more information about radon, visit: epa.gov/radon or call 1-800-SOS-RADON (767-7236)

All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.

All EPA press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.epa.gov/radon/nram/resources.html>

Sources:

United States Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov>

Office of The United States Surgeon General <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov>

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