

Surgeon General Releases National Health Advisory On Radon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, January 13, 2005

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U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona warned the American public about the risks of breathing indoor radon by issuing a national health advisory today. 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 country," 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 in January, National Radon Action Month, 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>.

For more information about radon go to EPA's Web site www.epa.gov/radon; or call your state radon office; or call a national toll-free hotline at 1-800-SOS-RADON (1-800-767-7236).

The Surgeon General's Workshop on Healthy Indoor Environment is bringing together the best scientific minds in the nation to discuss the continuing problem of unhealthy buildings. Indoor environments are structures including workplaces, schools, offices, houses and apartment buildings, and vehicles. According to a recent study, Americans spend between 85 and 95 percent of their time indoors.

In just the past 25 years, the percentage of health evaluations that the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has conducted related to indoor-air quality has increased from 0.5 percent of all evaluations in 1978, to 52 percent of all evaluations since 1990. This means that in those years, the evaluations related to air quality concerns have increased from one of every 200 evaluations to one of every two.

The problem is also adversely affecting our children's health as millions of homes and apartments and one in five schools in America have indoor air quality problems. This can trigger various allergies and asthma. Asthma alone accounts for 14 million missed school days each year. The rate of asthma in young children has risen by 160 percent in the past 15 years, and today one out of every 13 school-age children has asthma. Dr. Carmona is especially focusing on how unhealthy indoor environment affects children, as he promotes 2005 as The Year of the Healthy Child.

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

Last revised: January 4, 2007