



Home Tips®



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Q & A

Radon?

What exactly is Radon and why should I be concerned with it?

Radon is an invisible, odorless, naturally occurring gas. It is formed through the radioactive decay of uranium in soil. Once inside an enclosed space, radon can accumulate to dangerous levels. The EPA estimates 20% of the homes in the U.S. contains high levels of radon (EPA, 1987). Energy tight structures with low ventilation are particularly susceptible to radon accumulation. Scientist estimate that 5,000 to 20,000 lung cancer deaths annually in the U.S. may be attributed to radon (EPA, 1986).

The only way to determine the radon exposure risk to you and your family is to have your home tested. The most widely used radon detection devices are the charcoal canisters and the alpha track detectors. Both methods are reliable and economical. If radon is found, don't panic, there are ways of reducing the risk of exposure by sealing or ventilating the area. You will need to contact a radon contractor for proper evaluation..

For more information on radon, contact: Certus Laboratories, P.O. Box 105633, Atlanta, Georgia 30348 or call (404)762-5411.

Lead-Based Paint?

Our house is 32 years old and probably contains lead-based paint. Are there any precautions that should be taken to protect our children?

About two-thirds of the homes built before 1940 and one-half of the homes built between 1940 and 1960 contain heavily-lead-paint. Some of the homes built between 1960 and 1978 could contain heavily-lead-paint. The lead was used as a pigment and drying agent in "alkyd" oil based paint. "Latex" water based paint generally do not contain lead. In 1978, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission lowered the legal maximum lead content in most kinds of paint to 0.06% which is a trace amount.

Lead based paint is a major source of lead poisoning for children and can also affect adults. In children, lead

poisoning can cause irreversible brain damage and can impair mental functioning.

Eating or chewing paint chips is one way young children are exposed to lead. Ingesting and inhaling dust that is created as lead-based paint chinks, chips or peels from deteriorated surfaces is another way people become exposed to lead. Adults can also generate lead dust by sanding lead-based paint when remodeling or re-painting.

Consumers can reduce exposure to lead-based paint by covering the lead-based paint with a sealant and then painting over it or reduce the lead dust exposure by periodically wiping the surface with a high phosphorous (at least 5%) cleaning solution. The only completely safe way to eliminate the problem is by removing or replacing the paint or painted item by a licensed contractor that is experienced with lead-based paint.

For additional information, write to the Consumer Information Center, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, Colorado, 81002 and ask for a free copy of "Getting The Lead Out" publication number 532Z.

Lead In Drinking Water?

The copper water lines in our house are old and probably contain lead solder. Does the lead pose a health problem?

Jeff Cohen, chief of the Lead Task Force, at EPA's Office of Water, says that lead is not a hazard in everyone's home because, in general, lead levels in drinking water are low. But he says that concerned homeowners or apartment dwellers can take several steps to reduce lead content in water.

Begin with a water analysis on your household water. The average cost for someone to come to your home and take samples is \$75.00. If the analysis shows that the lead levels are about 20 ppb (parts per billion) or higher, let the water run before first use in the morning for 30 seconds or until the water runs cool. This flushes the lines. Do not use hot water for drinking or cooking since lead leaches more easily into hot water.

Another option is to try a water filter. There are some water filters on the market that do a pretty good job of removing lead.

For additional information, contact Applied Technical Services, Inc., Environmental Science Division, 1190 Atlanta Industrial Drive, Marietta, Georgia 30066, (404) 423-0508, ask for a copy of "Lead And Your Drinking Water".

Source: FDA Consumer Magazine, July-August 1991.

