



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Be sure to get your home in shape for the New Year

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In January many of us make resolutions to lose those extra pounds and get our bodies in shape for the New Year. January is also a great time to get your home in shape by checking for radon and carbon monoxide. To help ensure safety this season, the Alabama Department of Public Health offers the following tips for keeping your home safe and warm.

"Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, causing an estimated 22,000 deaths a year," said James L. McNees, Assistant Director of the Office of Radiation Control, Alabama Department of Public Health. "The best time to test for radon is during the colder months, when your home is closed and radon levels are likely to build to their highest concentrations. So this is the perfect time of year to give a test kit as a gift and urge friends or family to test their homes."

High levels of indoor radon have been found in many areas of Alabama; however, it appears to occur most frequently in homes across the Tennessee Valley and in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains from Jefferson and Shelby counties to Cleburne County. Because radon is a colorless, odorless gas that occurs naturally in soil and rocks through the breakdown of uranium, testing is the only way to know the radon level in a home. Radon test kits weigh only a few ounces and cost about \$10 or less.

Testing for radon should be done on the lowest level of the home on which people spend a lot of time, so a finished basement or a basement containing a workshop is a good place to test. Kitchens are not recommended testing areas.

"Testing directions are on the kit, and it only takes a few days to obtain a sample," McNees said. "Most people can easily do a radon test on their home. If test results are above the levels recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Alabama Department of Public Health, homeowners should consider installing a radon remediation system."

While radon test kits are available at many larger home improvement stores, homeowners can get one to test their own home for wholesale at many local offices of the Cooperative Extension System. More information on radon, including a list of certified radon testers and mitigators is available on the Internet at <http://www.aces.edu/radon> or by calling 1-800-582-1866.

Another hazard associated with winter is carbon monoxide (CO), which is a colorless, odorless, yet poisonous gas. When inhaled, it reduces the ability of the blood to carry oxygen to vital organs. According to the Center for Health Statistics, nine Alabamians died from CO poisoning in their homes in 2007.

“Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning such as headaches, dizziness, nausea and fatigue, are often mistaken for the flu, because the deadly gas goes undetected in a home,” cautioned health educator Samille J. Jackson. “Prolonged exposure can lead to brain damage and even death.”

Individuals most susceptible to the effects of CO are those with respiratory issues and undeveloped systems, infants and people with heart disease. Fuel burning home heating and cooking equipment such as fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, wood and coal stoves, and space or portable heaters are potential sources of CO; therefore, installers must follow strict codes and standards for venting. Vehicles or generators running in an attached garage can also produce dangerous levels of CO.

The Alabama Department of Public Health advises the following:

- Make sure carbon monoxide alarms are installed outside each sleeping area to provide an early warning of accumulating CO. If bedrooms are spaced apart, each area needs an alarm.

- Test CO alarms at least once a month and replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.

- If the CO alarm sounds, immediately move to a fresh air location and call for help. Remain at the fresh air location until emergency personnel clear the home.

- CO alarms are not substitutes for smoke alarms, the same as smoke alarms do not detect carbon monoxide. Know the difference between the sound of smoke alarms and CO alarms.

- All heating and cooking equipment should be tested and labeled by an independent testing laboratory.

- Inspect all heating equipment annually, and clean as necessary. Have gas stoves, furnaces and heaters properly adjusted to prevent over exposure to carbon monoxide.

- Make sure fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside and that the venting is kept clear and unobstructed.

- Be sure to turn all sources of gas completely off.

- Never use a gas range or oven for heating.

- Never use a charcoal grill or a barbecue grill indoors.

- Never use a generator inside a home, basement, or garage or near a window, door, or vent.

  - A generator should be placed well away from the house because CO can get pulled into the house through vents or open windows.

  - Never idle a car inside a closed garage.

To learn more about radon and other radiation and health issues, visit the ADPH Web site at [www.adph.org/radiation](http://www.adph.org/radiation). Heating safety information is available at [www.adph.org/injury](http://www.adph.org/injury).