

The Radon Lady

Bonnie Kellogg

Increasing Radon Awareness



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How The Radon Lady Tests for Radon in Granite (and other natural stones)

A July 2008 article in the New York Times (see reprint) has created considerable radon concern in individuals who are enjoying the beauty of natural stone, marble and granite in their homes.

The potential for radon in natural materials is not a new story. The EPA's "*Consumer's Guide to Radon Reduction*" chapter "*How Radon Enters Your House*" states:

In a small number of homes, the building materials (e.g., granite and certain concrete products) can give off radon, although building materials rarely cause radon problems by themselves. In the United States, radon gas in soils is the principal source of elevated radon levels in homes.

It is true, however, that **SOMETIMES** (as in the NYT article) a granite surface can be the source of radon, and the only way to know is to **test for it!**

To evaluate potential radon of a room with granitic material, start by comparing radon test results from the granite-containing areas versus same floor level rooms without the granite.

Most radon comes into homes from the ground. If your granite containing room is not on the lowest level of the home, get an additional kit or two and also test at the lowest used level as recommended.

Short term radon tests available for consumers require 3-7 days of testing in "closed house conditions." This means that the doors, windows and other air-flow locations are closed for 12 hours prior and 3 days during the testing period. If there is more than one level to the house, all levels must be closed. Normal entry and exit is permitted, but the air conditioning system should be on re-circulation with no air coming from outside.

Tip from the Short Term Kit Manufacturer:

If you are testing in the kitchen, eat out for a few days, because the fluctuations in temperature from cooking could alter the results.

When the results come back, if the radon levels in the granite containing room is higher than the non granite rooms, you may have a problem. Follow-up actions will depend on the actual results.

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Since the short term tests are forced “worst case” conditions, it is prudent to also perform long-term (Alpha Track) testing in the same areas. Long term testing does not have any special requirements or conditions except that the monitor is left in place for 90-364 days. A long term monitor that is in place for one “open window” and one “closed window” season will give a more realistic picture of radon levels in actual living conditions.

Summary of suggested test kits:

1 Short Term test kit for each room with granite, marble or other natural stone

1 or more Short Term test kits for another non-granite room on the same floor/level of the house

1 or more Short Term test kits for room or rooms at the lowest lived-in floor of the house.

1 Long Term (Alpha Track) test kit for each room containing granite or stone

1 Long Term (Alpha Track) test kit for another room at the same level for comparison of the results of the room containing granite or stone

1 Long Term (Alpha Track) test kit for the lowest livable area of the house, if it is not one of the above.

If testing is performed for a real estate transaction, a professional is required. Homeowners are encouraged to check their own homes, even if they don't have granite or stone. Radon, which was discovered only in 1983, is the second cause of lung cancer after cigarette smoking. It is responsible for more deaths than drunk drivers. Every year the number of people who die from radon related lung cancer is equal to having a 747 crash each week at SFO. That's a lot of deaths that can be avoided with simple and relatively inexpensive testing.

Bonnie Lee Kellogg, The Radon Lady, is a licensed professional radon, asbestos, lead and hazardous materials consultant. She is Director of KELLCO-MACS, a Bay Area based hazardous materials consulting company and laboratory.

The Radon Lady • Phone: (510) 786-9751 • theradonlady@gmail.com
www.TheRadonLady.com

3137 Diablo Avenue • Hayward, CA 94545