

February 19, 2019

To: House Committee on Education
From: Elizabeth Hamlin-Berninger, Director of Advocacy
Subj: In Support of H.138, Radon Testing in Schools

Thank you for the opportunity testify today. The American Lung Association, founded in 1904, is the oldest voluntary health organization in the country. Our mission is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through advocacy, education and research. We support H.138, the bill that proposes to require the Department of Health to perform radon testing in schools. This legislation will help to reduce the risk of lung cancer due to radon exposure among Vermont children and school employees.

Radon is found in the earth's rock and soil & formed by the natural breakdown of uranium. Radon gas seeps into buildings, including schools, through cracks and openings in the foundation.

Radon exposure is the **leading** cause of lung cancer among non-smokers, and second leading cause of all lung cancer after smoking. Lung cancer is the #1 cancer killer of both men and women in Vermont and in the United States. Lung cancer has one of the lowest five-year survival rates of all cancer types. An estimated 510 Vermonters will be diagnosed with lung cancer this year. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 51 Vermonters die each year due to radon exposure. These deaths are preventable!

Children are particularly vulnerable to radon exposure¹. Children have smaller lungs and a faster breathing rate than adults. The risk of lung cancer in children resulting from exposure to radon may be almost twice as high as the risk to adults exposed to the same amount of radon. If children are also exposed to tobacco smoke, the risk of getting lung cancer increases at least 20 times.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ranks indoor radon among the most serious environmental health problems facing us today. Because radon is colorless and odorless, the only way to know it is a problem is to test for it. Radon is measured in picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L), a measurement of radioactivity. Currently, under the Vermont Department of Health voluntary radon testing program, 14% of Vermont schools that have tested for radon since

¹ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Environmental Health and Education
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/csem.asp?csem=8&po=7>

2005 have radon levels above the EPA action level of 4 picocuries/liter, **with some as high as five times the action level.**²

How many children in Vermont are being exposed to toxic levels of radon?

While radon testing in Vermont schools has been in the [news](#) lately, and free testing offered by the Department of Health is being offered, to date only 91 schools have been tested since 2005.

It's time for Vermont to require radon testing and disclosure in all public schools.

The American Lung Association urges you to pass H.138 this session.

Thank you.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Elizabeth.hamlin@lung.org or 518-545-5045.

² Vermont Department of Health, Radon in Schools, <http://www.healthvermont.gov/environment/school/radon-schools>

