

Canada's radon guidelines are inadequate

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Radon gas is a silent health threat, and Canada needs to align its guidelines for acceptable radon levels with World Health Organization (WHO) limits, argues an editorial in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

"We are left in an odd situation in Canada," writes Dr. Diane Kelsall, Deputy Editor, *CMAJ*. "Drivers and passengers are required to wear [seat belts](#), which are estimated to save about 1000 lives per year. Smoke alarms are required in most jurisdictions, reducing the annual rate of fire-related deaths from 130 per million households by about two-thirds. Yet, the federal government has adopted a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach to radon, a proven carcinogen that is ubiquitous and causes thousands of deaths each year."

Radon, an odourless gas produced from the breakdown of uranium in soil and bedrock, can be found in many homes and buildings in Canada. In 2014, it caused an estimated 3000 deaths from lung cancer. About 7% of houses in Canada have radon levels above the Canadian limit of 200 Bq/m³, although this maximum is twice that of the WHO's limit of 100 Bq/m³.

To protect Canadians, Dr. Kelsall recommends that acceptable levels be lowered to meet the WHO's limit. She also calls for mandatory testing and mitigation in public buildings such as schools and hospitals, as well as incorporation and enforcement of radon prevention measures into building codes, tax credits and financial relief for low-income Canadians to test for and mitigate any radon in their homes.

More information: *Canadian Medical Association Journal*,
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