National Radon Action Month

To raise awareness and save lives, the EPA has declared January as National Radon Action Month. The campaign sets to inform Americans on the risks associated with radon exposure and encourages everyone to “Test. Fix. Save a Life.”

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that you cannot see, smell, or taste. Radon is considered the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 1 out of every 15 homes have high concentrations of radon.

Radon is released from radium in the ground and enters the home through cracks, or other penetrations, in a building’s foundation. A secondary cause of radon in a building is from off-gassing of radon from use of ground water. In rare cases, building materials can also be a source of radon within a building. While there are geographic areas that are more prone to higher levels of radon, radon can be detected at high concentrations even in states or regions considered to have low radon potential. The only way to know if the occupants of a building are at risk of elevated radon exposure is to perform radon testing within the building.

Dr. Bill Field, Professor of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health and

Additional Info: Recommended Practices for Safety and Health Programs; On-the-Job Deaths Reach Highest Level in 12 Years; The National Radon Action Plan; Radon Guidance for Health Care Providers; Reducing the Risk from Radon
The Hazards of Winter Weather

Winter weather hazards can include slippery roads and surfaces, strong winds, and extreme cold, which can lead to illnesses, injuries, or fatalities. Working outdoors in the winter requires additional preparation by both employers and workers. Employees should be trained on the hazards of winter weather such as cold stress, slippery roads and surfaces, and windy conditions.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration advises workers to “Plan, Equip, Train,” for winter weather. Safe work practices should be implemented to protect workers.

CDC recommendations for preventing slips on snow and ice:
• Wear shoes or boots with traction.
• Be especially careful when entering or exiting a vehicle.
• Assume that all wet or dark areas on pavement are slippery.
• Walk like a penguin.

How to Walk Like a Penguin

Keep your hands out of your pockets. Extend them out to your sides to help you keep your balance, like you’re walking a tight rope.

Bend your knees slightly, point your toes outward a little bit, and walk flat-footed. Take short, slow steps.

With each step, keep your center of gravity above your front leg. Normally, we put our leading foot out and let it pull us forward. When you penguin walk, you want to keep your body directly above your foot as you place it.

If you do fall backward, try to tuck your chin. That way your back, not your head, will hit the ground first.

Safety Resources for a Diverse Workforce

Did you know that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration provides compliance assistance resources in Spanish? The resources can be found at https://www.osha.gov/complianceassistance/index-hispanic.

In addition, OSHA has a large number of COVID-19 resources available in Spanish, including alerts, guidance, publications, public service announcements, posters, videos, and wallet cards. These resources can be found at https://www.osha.gov/spanish-resources-covid-19.html.

COVID-19 publications are available in a number of other languages on the OSHA website.

Looking for more resources? OSHA on Winter Weather
Iowa Students Receive Scholarships from the Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Council

Every year, the Governor’s Safety & Health Conference awards three academic scholarship awards to Iowa students in occupational health and safety. This year, students from the University of Iowa and Iowa State University were presented with the 2020 scholarship awards.

Jack Beno Memorial Scholarship
Nastaran Moradi, The University of Iowa

Nastaran is pursuing a master's degree in Industrial Hygiene at the University of Iowa College of Public Health and is a trainee of the Heartland Center. She previously received a master's degree in environmental engineering where she researched methods to remediate nano-particle pollutions.

Bill Dickinson Scholarship
Lindsay Heck, The University of Iowa

Lindsay is pursuing a master's degree in Industrial Hygiene at the University of Iowa College of Public Health and is also a Heartland Center trainee. She completed her BS in Health & Wellness at Canisius College where she worked as a research assistant in clinical exercise programs for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Iowa Occupational Safety & Health Advisory Council Scholarship
Christian Feye, Iowa State University

Christian graduated in December 2020 and plans to continue his education by attending the University of Iowa next fall to pursue a master's degree in the College of Public Health.

Dr. Fredric Gerr Receives 2020 Distinguished Faculty Award

Dr. Fred Gerr has served as a professor in the University of Iowa Department of Occupational and Environmental Health for the last 18 years and has transitioned to professor emeritus in 2020. Dr. Gerr gave the Distinguished Faculty Lecture on December 2, 2020. The presentation was titled Meat Packing Plant Workers: A Case Study of a Precarious Workforce and gave an overview of both past and present occupational injury and illnesses faced by meat packing plant workers. You can read more and view a recording of the lecture on the College of Public Health website.