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LEE ON THE LOOKOUT

Radioactive Countertops

Elizabeth Lee

Granite countertops are the latest trend for bathrooms and kitchens, but Rice University's professor William Llope has discovered some radioactive countertops made out of granite.

Llope says radiation is all around us. It is in the soil and even in every day household items like smoke detectors and granite countertops. Most of them give off harmless amounts of radiation.

Llope calls it a part of the "natural background."

However, he has found high levels of radiation in some of the granite samples he has collected. Llope says the radiation doses are hundreds if not thousands of times the natural background. He says exposure to these levels of radiation over time can potentially cause cancer.

Fred Spaulding sells granite countertops and is an active member of the National Association of Remodeling Industry.

He agrees that uranium in the granite breaks down into radon, a cancer causing radioactive gas.

However, he sites numerous scientific studies and even a statement from the Environmental Protective Agency that all came to a similar conclusion: there is not enough radioactive radon gas from granite countertops to be harmful to your health.

State Health officials say radon from the soil under your home may be more dangerous. Llope says what he finds troubling is the radiation from the uranium itself.

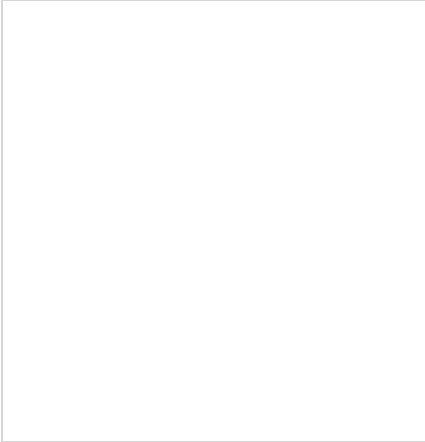
It is not a gas and cannot be easily eliminated."Especially when you have 100 square feet of it or 50 square feet of it in a kitchen and spend many hours a day in this kitchen there is no question that there is potential for risk."

However, Llope emphasizes most of the granite samples he has tested are safe, but since he has found a few that are hot enough to pose a risk, plus what is in the soil can also be radioactive, Llope recommends everyone to test their home with a kit you can buy at the hardware store.

State health officials recommend buying at least two, if not more radon test kits. Place one in the kitchen and one in the room where you spend most of your time. If you find high levels of radiation, repeat the test throughout the house to find the source. If the radiation is coming from your countertop, you may have to remove it.

You can also contact radon detecting experts to professionally test your home. You can also purchase a radiation detecting geiger counter to test the countertop. Llope says he would not shy away from buying a granite countertop. He would just make sure the piece he buys is not radioactive.

[For frequently asked questions about radon and indoor air quality click here.](#)



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