

Radon Exposure from Granite Countertops – Reassuring Consumer Safety

There have been reports of granite countertops emitting radioactivity. Some reports have said that even though most granite countertops tested were nothing to be worried about, some have had “hot-spots” that emit levels that can be life threatening. You may even read reports that claim some colors of granite pose more of a threat than others. Another report showed higher test results in exotic granite and recommends that anyone who is concerned should have their granite countertop tested. So, is there a danger of radiation exposure from granite countertops or is this myth?

What is radon and how does it become a threat? Radon is a radioactive gas that is colorless, odorless and tasteless. It is formed by the breakdown of uranium, a natural radioactive material found in soil, rock and groundwater. When radon escapes from the ground into the outdoor air, it is diluted to low concentrations and is not a concern; however, in an enclosed space it can accumulate to high levels and break down to form additional radioactive particles called progeny that can contaminate the air you breathe.

Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and it does pose a serious health risk. Most experts agree that there really is no “safe” level of radon and that all radiation has the potential to damage DNA within cells. A lifetime exposure to low levels can lead to cancer.

Granite countertops have been a very popular addition to homes since the 1990’s. If any reputable studies showed that they were a serious health threat, then they would have either been outlawed by now or necessary steps would be taken to cure the problem.

Some of the reports that have been printed were later proven to be marketing scams by companies who sell synthetic products rather than natural stone. The hype and panic caused by this competitive marketing has proven to be more harmful than the threat they are claiming against granite being used in homes.

According to the EPA, “There is radiation all around us and we need to be aware of the various sources--when to be concerned and how to protect ourselves from harmful exposure. Radiation has been part of the earth since the beginning of time. Construction materials such as concrete, cinder blocks, bricks, and granite contain small amounts of radioactive materials that are found naturally in the materials used to make them.” These quotes were taken from the web page at <http://www.epa.gov/radiation/sources/index.html#construction>

Though there have been many reports to generate concern, studies have failed to produce evidence that granite countertops pose a significant health risk. The EPA believes that the main source of radon in homes is soil gas that is drawn

indoors through a natural suction process. The EPA has no reliable data to conclude that natural stone countertops are increasing indoor radon levels.

This article was written by Chuck Russo, CEO of Surface Encounters, the leading granite, marble and quartz manufacturers in the US. Advanced technology sets them apart from other natural stone fabricators. With computer numerically controlled stone processing equipment, they get a perfectly cut and polished edge on every countertop. Surface Encounters has mastered technology in a stone-aged industry.