

# Town Health Officer News

Environmental Health News

Winter 2014

## Outdoor Wood Boilers in Your Community

Every year, as temperatures start to drop, many towns receive complaints about outdoor wood boilers (OWBs). OWBs are residential or small commercial wood-fired water heaters that are located outdoors or are separated from the space being heated. The fires in the large fire boxes heat water that is circulated into the home through underground pipes. The older styles of OWBs emit dense smoke, which can impact neighbors and affect public health – particularly for children, older adults, and people who have diabetes, heart disease, asthma or any other lung disease. According to the American Lung Association, the fine particulate found in wood smoke can be linked to higher school absenteeism, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations for cardiopulmonary conditions, respiratory infections, and asthma.

Newer OWBs should meet state standards for particulate emissions after certification tests are conducted in EPA approved laboratories. The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation through their Air Quality & Climate Division (AQCD) offers a voluntary change-out program that provides financial incentives to swap out an old OWB system for a cleaner, more efficient heating system.

As a Town Health Officer, you can be a valuable partner with the AQCD in compliance cases and in promoting their voluntary change-out program. Any questions or complaints should be sent directly to the section chief, John Wakefield, at [john.wakefield@state.vt.us](mailto:john.wakefield@state.vt.us) or by calling AQCD at 802-828-1288.

More information on wood boilers and the change-out program can be found here:

[www.anr.state.vt.us/air/hwmOWBchangeoutprogram](http://www.anr.state.vt.us/air/hwmOWBchangeoutprogram)

[www.vtwoodsmoke.org](http://www.vtwoodsmoke.org)

## Rental Housing Heat Reminder

The Vermont Rental Housing Health Code contains specific provisions for heating in rental properties.

All rental units and rooming houses must:

1. Have functioning heating facilities, in good repair, which vent to the outside.
2. Be able to provide heat when the outside temperature is less than 55° F.
3. Be able to maintain a room temperature of at least 65° F in all habitable rooms.

And if the owner of a rental unit is providing heat to the occupants as part of a rental agreement (as in a lease where heat is included in the rent) he or she must provide heat to all habitable rooms when the temperature is below 55° F.



## January is National Radon Awareness Month

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that results from the breakdown of uranium in soil and bedrock. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers in the United States. The EPA estimates that radon accounts for approximately 20,000 lung cancer deaths every year in the United States. The Vermont Department of Health estimates that approximately 60 lung cancer deaths per year in Vermont are a result of exposure to radon out of a total of about 380 lung cancer deaths per year from all causes.

Although Vermont has no laws about radon, it is a very important public health issue and all houses should be tested for radon. Town Health Officers can help reduce lung cancer risk in Vermont by encouraging Vermonters, both homeowners and renters, to take advantage of the Vermont Department of Health's free long-term radon test kit program. The Vermont Department of Health's Radon Program distributes about 2,000 free long-term radon test kits every year and over 18,000 houses have been tested. Because radon levels can change daily, weekly, and seasonally, a long-term test of 3–12 months (ideally including a heating season) best captures a resident's long-term exposure.

"Radon cannot be seen, smelled or tasted, so the only way to know if a house has elevated levels of radon is to test for it," said David Grass, a Health Department epidemiologist. "A radon problem cannot be predicted by the style, age, or location of a home. About 13 percent of houses tested in Vermont have elevated levels of radon."

Testing is easy. Just follow the instructions, place the test kit, and then mail it back to the Health Department to get the results when the testing period is over.

Get a free kit by e-mailing [radon@state.vt.us](mailto:radon@state.vt.us), or call 1-800-439-8550.

Exposure to high levels of radon is preventable and fixable through proper mitigation techniques. If test results show high levels of radon in the air, a mitigation system can be installed at a cost of approximately \$800–\$2,000.

For information about radon, radon testing, and mitigation, visit the Health Department website at [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov).

## For Help and Information

Did you know that the Town Health Officers have an active email list serve? To join the list please contact Marielle Strong ([marielle.strong@state.vt.us](mailto:marielle.strong@state.vt.us)).

Keep up to with Health Department news at [www.facebook.com/HealthVermont](http://www.facebook.com/HealthVermont) and [twitter.com/healthvermont](https://twitter.com/healthvermont).

All of our district offices have Facebook pages with local information. Find your local office at [healthvermont.gov/interactive\\_media.aspx](http://healthvermont.gov/interactive_media.aspx).

**Vermont Department of Health**

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## When Pests Move Inside

Many of the creatures we'd prefer to avoid, like rodents and insects, would love nothing more than to spend their winter inside a warm house. The Vermont Department of Health recommends that home and rental owners practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to help deal with these unwelcome visitors. IPM is a different approach to traditional pest control and relies more on prevention and trapping. This can be challenging to implement, particularly in multifamily housing, but can greatly increase the health and safety of people by reducing contact with pests and with traditional poisons or other harmful chemicals.

The four basic components of IPM are:

1. Eliminate food sources for pests (including managing garbage outside the home).
2. Eliminate breeding and nesting places (cleaning up wood piles, debris, and clutter).
3. Eliminate access points into the home (seal up even small holes using chew proof materials).
4. Eliminate existing population (use traps to remove any pests already in the home).

As a Town Health Officer, you can be a great resource to property owners and tenants in your community. Use the principles of IPM when you do a rental inspection to better understand the extent of a pest infestation. For more information see: [www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/eLearn/IPM.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/eLearn/IPM.htm).

## Upcoming Free Trainings

**Tuesday, March 11, Montpelier**  
Capitol Plaza Hotel and Conference Center  
100 State Street

**Thursday, March 13, Rutland**  
Holiday Inn, 476 Holiday Drive

*Cosponsored by: Vermont League Of Cities and Towns  
and Vermont Department Of Health*

Trainings will cover the general duties of a THO, learning more about Healthy Housing, and tips about rental housing inspections. To register or learn more about the event go to: [www.vlct.org/events-news-blogs/event-calendar/](http://www.vlct.org/events-news-blogs/event-calendar/).

## Past Trainings Online

If you are a new Town Health Officer and are looking for some basic trainings or if you were unable to attend the great in-person trainings that we offer in partnership with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the Vermont Department of Health has posted all past trainings on the website [healthvermont.gov/local/tho/tho.aspx](http://healthvermont.gov/local/tho/tho.aspx).

**Health Officer Hotline:**

1-800-439-8550