



Protect Health and Safety in BC Building Code

Health and safety are the foundation of building codes. Consumer protection must always be the first consideration when contemplating changes to the code.

Therefore, VRBA does extensive research before supporting proposed building code changes such as BC's Step Code.

Past unintended consequences due to inadequate government research include asbestos, and urea formaldehyde insulation and leaky condo.

All were the result of fast-tracking energy efficiency in homes without due diligence and proven practice.

The costs to mitigate these issues are enormous and ongoing. Government still refuses to provide a rebate for safe removal of asbestos, even though the material was approved and subsidized by the Canadian Home Insulation program (CHIP).

The latest health and safety issue that has our attention is toxic radon gas, shown to increase in energy efficient homes.

Radon is an invisible, odorless gas that seeps into homes through cracks in floors, walls and foundations. It is created by the breakdown of uranium in the soil.

When radon mixes with the air outside, it's not a problem. But when radon enters closed-in spaces like homes, it can be harmful.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in Canada, which has three times more exposure than the world average.

We learned the following at a conference by the Canadian Association of Radon Scientists and Technicians:

- Radon is site-specific and every home should be tested. Contrary to BC's radon map, there are no safe regions for radon.
- New homes should be tested right after construction and again two years later due to concrete settling and shrinkage.
- Radon levels double in retrofits with the greatest impact from double-glazed windows.
- In addition to lung cancer, radon is linked to lymphoma, myeloma and leukemia. Leukemia is the type of cancer most often found in children.
- Canada's radon maximum of 200 bq is likely unsafe over the long-term, especially for children. The World Health Organization's maximum is 100 bq.
- Even low radon areas add to lung cancer risk when homes are occupied by smokers.
- Very air-tight homes lacking sufficient ventilation are showing higher radon levels.

The BC government launched their energy efficient Step Code prior to a radon review only recently underway by the National Building Code.

Municipal councils with little or no knowledge of these issues are implementing the BC Step Code through their local bylaws.

It is another recipe for potentially harmful unintended consequences and undermines health and safety in BC's Building Code.

This is why VRBA advocates for a single building code standard throughout the province with changes based on research, proven practice and affordability.



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