

State and Local

EPA warns homeowners of possible health risk

By Jeff Pollard
Staff Writer

A new threat to the health of Americans has been identified, and the Environmental Protection Agency has issued a warning to homeowners that they may need to have the situation taken care of immediately.

Radon, a radioactive gas given off in the decomposition of uranium, is listed by the United States Department of Health as second only to smoking as a leading cause of lung cancer.

The EPA is taking action to inform the public of the dangers of radon.

The agency had two options in addressing the problem, Dr. Hank May, a radon researcher with the EPA, says.

They could create a series of regulations that would have to be passed by Congress, he says, or they could devise a plan to inform those people who might be affected.

"The regulation approach could drag out for a decade or more," May says. "We wanted to get right to it and we have developed a number of programs that are already in effect."

Unlike many other health risks, the problem with radon is a completely natural occurrence. As uranium in the soil breaks down, the radon emitted makes its way to the

surface. When it reaches the surface, the radon dissipates and no longer presents a health risk.

The problem occurs when the radon's path to the surface is blocked by a building. The radon is trapped beneath the foundation until it can find a new way out of the ground.

Nancy L. Sawtelle, an assistant professor who works with the Texas Energy Extension Service at Texas A&M, says that the radon most often escapes through holes and cracks in a building's foundation. The radon is then trapped in the house, she says, and begins to build up.

"Energy-conservative houses tend to trap radon more so than others because they are so well sealed in or-

der to conserve energy," Sawtelle says. "The best way to solve this problem is to seal the cracks and holes and clogging drains that connect directly to the ground. If this can't be done, there are systems called heat exchangers that will ventilate the house while maintaining its energy efficiency."

Dr. Milton McLain, A&M professor of nuclear engineering and under-director of radiation research, says the health risk caused by radon depends on the type of exposure.

"It is a matter of relative risk," McLain says. "For zero radon concentration, there is zero risk. As you increase the concentration and length of time exposed to it, you have in-

creased the possibility of lung cancer."

The EPA has set a concentration level of four pico-curies/liter (pCi/l) as the point at which homeowners should take some sort of action, but according to May, any level of exposure can be dangerous.

"People were calling us all of the time asking us how high of a concentration is too high," May says. "We were forced to set some sort of level."

"What we came up with is not a safe level because there is no safe level of concentration. What we are giving is an action guide. If the concentration is below four, we don't say that it is safe but that it is not an urgent situation."

May says that according to their action guide, the situation does not

need to be treated immediately until the concentration is over 200 pCi/l.

All homeowners should have the radon level in their homes tested to determine if action should be taken, he says.

In addition to homeowners, many businesses also are running tests for radon radiation levels, May says.

Typically, high risk areas are located around large concentrations of granite, which is partially composed of uranium, and around commercially mined uranium deposits. Based on this information, the EPA has listed several areas as potential "hot spots," including a large area north of San Antonio and a line that runs parallel to the Texas coastline about 150 miles inland.

Graduate student hopes to enlighten adults about who really roams at night

By Mia B. Moody
Reporter

Warning, you may be rooming with a sleepwalker.

Many people believe that sleepwalking is something that only affects small children, but the truth is some people never stop sleepwalking.

Jim Dupree, a graduate student in educational psychology, is doing a dissertation on sleepwalking. He hopes to prove that adults sleepwalk more than is believed and to find out more about the causes of sleepwalking.

"Sleepwalking began to interest me when I used to teach educational psychology courses at Texas A&M," Dupree said. "My students told me so many stories about their roommates or adult family members sleepwalking that it led me to believe that sleepwalking is more prevalent among adults than it is reported. Medical journals say 15 percent of normal children sleepwalk and only .1 to 1 percent of adults sleepwalk, but from my experiences, I believe the rate for adults is a lot higher."

Dupree's definition of sleepwalking is a person getting up, leaving the bed and walking about. While sleepwalking, the person is unresponsive to others and may be difficult to awaken. The person awakens with no recall of the incident.

"No one knows the cause of sleepwalking, therefore, there is no cure," Dupree said. "Psychotherapy, medication and hypnosis can be used to suppress stage four of the sleep cycle which is usually when sleepwalking occurs."

"Stage four happens two to three hours after a person goes to sleep. Most people awaken during this cy-

cle to use the restroom, but some people remain in a deep slumber. This is when sleepwalkers get up and walk around."

Dupree said that in most cases sleepwalking is not dangerous.

"Sleepwalking is not dangerous since the sleepwalker usually walks around for awhile and then goes back to sleep," he said. "Sometimes, however, sleepwalking can become more serious. Sleepwalkers have experienced problems like holding babies while sleepwalking, choking a spouse, or waking up in the middle of the street under a bright lamp in a night gown."

Alonzo Sais, a senior political science major, remembers an incident at an officer candidate school where a man was dismissed because he was a sleepwalker.

"A sleepwalker in combat would be very dangerous because he might start walking around one night and alert the enemies to the location of his unit," Sais said.

Last year Dupree worked at the Central Louisiana State Hospital on a sleepwalking study. He also anchored a weeklong news series on

sleepwalking. Dupree said the radio station sponsored the news series because there had been a recent incident where a man murdered his mother and blamed it on sleepwalking.

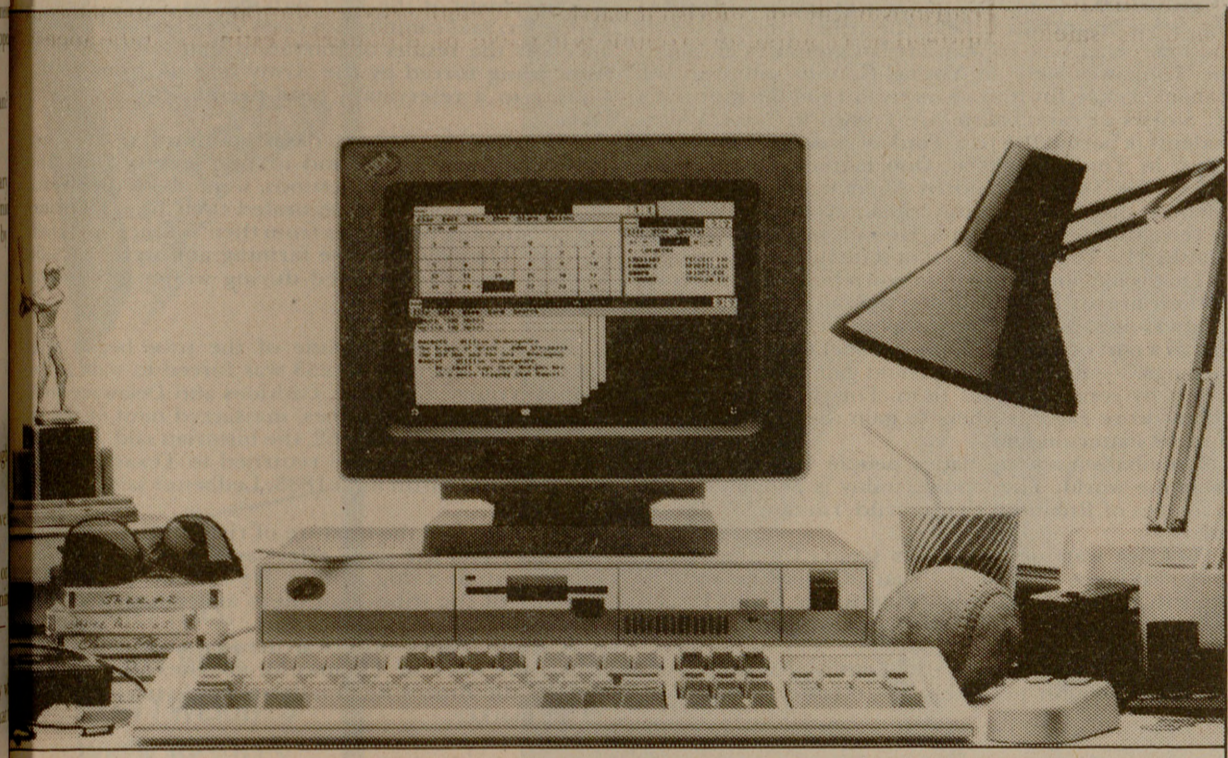
Participants in Dupree's study will be asked about their sleepwalking tendencies, family life and personality. He will then compare the findings of non-sleepwalkers with those of sleepwalkers. His study will be conducted nationwide with the help of professors from colleges in Louisiana, California, Pennsylvania and Arizona. These professors will use the same research methods as Dupree and they will then mail him the results. He will also get information from the 30 sleep disorder centers in the United States.

If your roommate walks around in the middle of the night with a dazed look in his eyes, you might be rooming with a sleepwalker. Tell him if he wants to learn more about this disorder and assist in a research project, he should get in contact with Jim Dupree through the Counseling and Assessment Clinic in the educational psychology department.

Correction

A headline in Monday's *Battalion* incorrectly reported that enrollment in the Corps of Cadets decreased for Fall 1989. The headline should have read, "Corps enrollment decreases for Fall '88."

The *Battalion* regrets the error.



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In Advance

Forum to feature former Iranian hostage

"Terrorism and the Persian Gulf" will be discussed at the MSC Political Forum scheduled for 8:00 p.m. today in Rudder Theater.

Col. Charles Scott, a former Iranian hostage and military intelligence expert, will speak at the forum, which is sponsored in co-

operation with MSC Jordan Institute.

Scott, a hostage during the Carter administration, will discuss problems that led to the hostage situation and preventative measures for the future.

Admission for the forum will be free, and all students, faculty and staff members are invited.

Exiled Soviet pastor to speak at Duncan

Georgi Vins, a former Soviet Union citizen who was incarcerated for eight years in Soviet prison camps for his Christian beliefs, will speak at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in Duncan Dining Hall and at 7:30 Friday at Room 201 MSC during the annual Aggie Corps Christian Muster.

Other Muster activities will continue through Saturday.

Vins is a ninth-generation minister whose father was an American missionary who died in a Soviet prison camp. Vins was a

pastor and evangelist in the Soviet Union before his imprisonment and exile to the United States in 1979.

His family eventually was allowed to join him here.

Vins is a United States citizen now, living in Elkhart, Ind., where he is a representative of the persecuted church in the Soviet Union. He has established the International Representation for the Council of Evangelical Baptist Churches of the Soviet Union.

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