

# Casey ups war on radon, funds may not be enough

By LORI MILLER  
Collegian Staff Writer

Gov. Robert P. Casey is waging a war against radon with more environmental funding. However, the money may not be enough to solve the problem, which affects most of the eastern United States.

Radon has been determined to be the cause of 20,000 lung cancer deaths a year, according to Environmental Protection Agency reports. Radon, the result of the natural radioactive decay of uranium in soil, becomes hazardous when its decay products, called "daughters," enter basements, storage areas or water and sewer lines.

"Daughters" stick to dust particles that, when inhaled, cling to lung linings and can cause damage. Lengthy inhalation of "daughters" can lead to lung cancer.

Casey has proposed a \$197 million allotment for the Department of Environmental Resources, compared with the \$165 million allotted for the current fiscal year, said John Taylor, the governor's deputy press secretary. About \$1.4 million would be for radon testing, compared with the current \$1.26 million, he said.

Although the EPA considers radon a major problem, two University experts say the gas is not a big problem in the State College area.

"Compared to the people of the Reading Prong, we're better off," said William E. White, professor of geochemistry. "In eastern Pennsylvania, the rocks are mostly granite, which contains a fairly substantial amount of radon."

The Reading Prong is a uranium-rich vein of granite that extends from Reading to Pottsville, N.Y.

University health physicist Roger Granlund said although State College was not in the Reading Prong, some

scattered residential areas in the borough have elevated radon levels. Granlund said about 100 University buildings, including some residence halls, were tested for radon during the past two winters. About 100 buildings on the Commonwealth campuses were also tested, he said.

University Park had only a few places with an average radon concentration of two picocuries per liter — slightly less than the amount of radiation received from about 200 chest X-rays per year, he said. Radon gas was found primarily in unoccupied places such as basements, storage areas and tunnels, he said.

Although all soil gases have a relatively high level of radon, more dangerous levels develop when the gases find a place to get into the structure and are trapped, undiluted or not ventilated, he said.

Overall, Granlund said, University Park has had very few problems with radon gas. About eight out of 100 buildings on campus, however, should be re-tested, he said.

Five buildings have been re-tested at the Commonwealth campuses, he said.

When the radon detection groups go back to re-test, they will find out whether the problem is in occupied areas, he said.

Jeff Brill of the State College Health Department said no recent radon testing has been conducted. "If there were to be any more testing, (the state Department of Environmental Resources) would handle it," he said.

The DER recently distributed an advisory officially suggesting that residents in 35 counties test for radon, he said.

For Centre County, the DER has recommended that local residents conduct tests, not because there are problem levels, but because enough

data indicate that residents should test their homes, he said. Findings from people who have tested their homes for radon make up these data.

Problems with radon gas are unique to each region because more than one factor contributes to them, he said. Types of geology, building construction and ventilation systems are some of the factors involved.

A combination of all three factors makes it difficult to pinpoint a specific factor that would make one area at greater risk than another, he said.

"It's hard to pin down the exact source of the problem. The high levels of radon are sporadic and isolated," he said. However, he added, better insulated homes are at greater risk that bigger buildings because they can trap the gas more easily.

Recently, the EPA estimated that 8 million homes in the United States are directly affected by radon. Radon has been detected in 30 states, and chances are that all 50 states may be affected, according to Newsweek magazine.

New Jersey has initiated several steps to reduce radon, but more funding is needed to accomplish its goal, said Elaine Makatura from the state's Department of Environmental Protection.

In January 1986, \$3.2 million was apportioned to the New Jersey Department of Health, DEP, and the Department of Community Affairs to solve the radon problem, she said.

With the funds received, "DEP implemented a toll-free number for homeowners to talk to me or a radiation physicist," Makatura said.

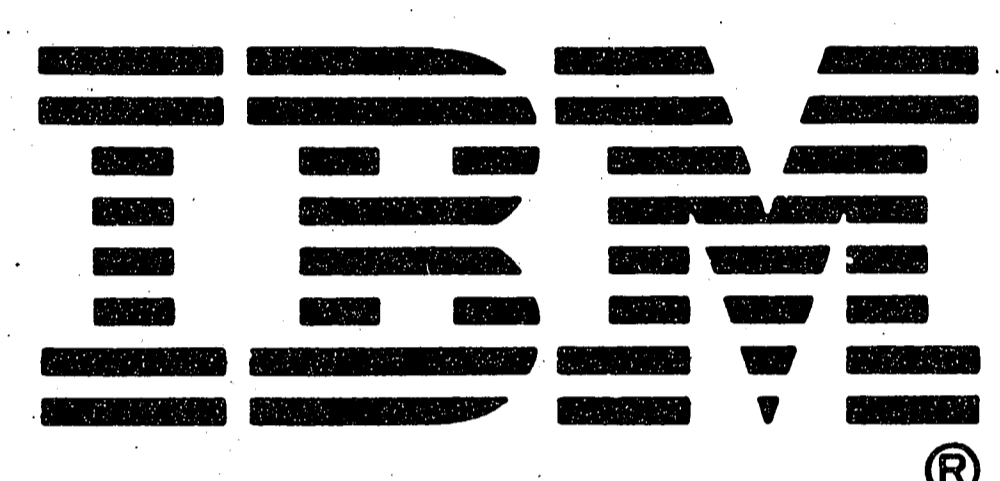
DEP has sent informational packages containing brochures to homeowners and provided public announcements of television and radio, she said, adding that 6,000 homes have been mapped and tested.

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# police log

- Unknown persons caused \$300 damage to the hood of a car owned by Steven Frank, 305 Plaza Drive, while it was parked near his residence Monday, the State College Bureau of Police Services said.
- A coat, with glasses, keys, a scarf and gloves, worth \$257 total, were reported Monday to have been missing April 4 from Delta Tau Delta fraternity, 429 E. Hamilton Ave., by Jocelyn Aqua, 133 Simmons, State College police said.
- A \$50 camera was reported missing from a taxicab Monday by Rona Greenberg, 216 Haller, State College police said.
- A \$40 bike was reported missing Monday from the north side of Porter room in Chambers Building by Tika Johnson, 616 E. College Ave., University Police Services said.
- A \$50 ring was reported missing Monday from a ground floor rest-

— by Mike Lenio

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