

# Having Your Home Checked for Health Hazards:

## An Introductory Fact Sheet for Residents



Community organizations around the country are working with the Community Environmental Health Resource Center (CEHRC) to do *Home Hazard Investigations* to check for health hazards at no charge to community residents.

Many older homes have problems that can make residents sick. For example, hazards in housing can cause asthma attacks and lead poisoning in children. These hazards and related illnesses are often the result of poorly maintained homes and landlord neglect.

For most hazards, different things can be done – both short-term and long-term – to help protect your health. But finding the problem is the first step to solving it. A written agreement between you and our organization makes sure that everyone is clear about how the process works, what hazards we will check for, what the results mean, what help we may be able to offer, and what may be expected of you.

A *Home Hazard Investigation* cannot guarantee your home is completely safe — it checks for serious hazards. These tests are pretty simple, but that is often enough to find major problems. Here is how the *Home Hazard Investigation* works:

### Visual Survey

- The first step is a Visual Survey – looking carefully for obvious signs of hazards and code violations, both inside and outside your home. The Hazard Investigator will draw a picture of your home and yard and note problems such as peeling paint, water damage, and signs of cockroaches and rodents.

The Hazard Investigator may photograph some hazards – unless you don't want a picture taken.

### Collecting Samples to be Sent to a Lab

**But, not all of the hazards will need to go to a lab.**

- For many hazards, we can't tell if there is a problem just by looking. Sending a small "sample" to a lab is the best way to tell. Different kinds of samples check for different hazards. Hazard Investigators will check for some or all of the following:
  - **Lead in Paint Chips** – Peeling lead paint poisons many children. If we find peeling paint or paint chips on the ground or floor, we put them in a clean tube or bag and send them to a lab to see if the paint has lead. Taking paint chip samples this way will not damage your home.

- **Lead in Dust** – Most children are poisoned by lead dust on floors and windowsills. The dust gets on their hands and toys, which they put into their mouths. Wiping a small area and sending the sample to a lab is how we test for lead in dust.
- **Lead in Soil** – Bare soil that has lead can also be a hazard. To check, we take a few spoonfuls of soil from a few bare spots in the yard. This sample also gets sent to the lab to measure the lead content.
- **Radon** – Radon is an invisible gas that can build-up in homes and cause cancer. A radon detector is left in the home for 2 to 4 days. During the test, you need to keep doors and windows closed except for going in and out. We then pick up the detector and send it to a lab to check for radon.
- **Cockroaches** - Cockroach droppings and body parts can cause asthma attacks. We leave roach traps in warm, dark areas, such as behind appliances. After a few days, we pick up the traps, and count the roaches. This shows how bad the problem is and where to try to fix it. But, this won't go to a lab.
- **Carbon Monoxide** - This odorless, colorless poisonous gas is made when natural gas, wood, propane or other fuels are burned. It kills hundreds each year and gives people flu symptoms. We will set out an electronic monitor for a few days that checks the air for carbon monoxide. It will record the highest level measured and alarm if there are life-threatening levels. This won't go to the lab either.

## Getting the Results

- You will receive a written report of the results and an explanation as to what they mean, usually at a face-to-face meeting where you can ask questions.

## Correcting Problems Found

- You will also get information about things you may be able to do to reduce risk from hazards in the short-term. But, if you rent, keep in mind that your landlord has a legal duty to ensure that your housing is safe.

## Long-Term Solutions

- You may want to work with other concerned residents who are working with our organization to get landlords to fix the problems and get government agencies to enforce the law.
- We may compile the results with tests of other homes to show community-wide hazards. We will get your approval before releasing any information that would identify your name or address.