



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS
1493 CAMBRIDGE STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
498-1349

MELVIN H. CHALFEN, M.D.
COMMISSIONER

December 6, 1988

Mr. Robert W. Healy
City Manager
Executive Office
City Hall
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Re: Council Order #6
Radon

Dear Mr. Healy:

In regard to testing for the presence of radon in schools, the hospital, and other public buildings testing companies have been contacted as part of the bidding process to secure their services. We will be starting the tests in the very near future in the schools. Ms. Mary Lou McGrath has asked appropriate people in the School Department to work with the testing company selected. We estimate that about 300 separate sites within the schools will be tested. The test takes 48 hours and the results are available in another 48-72 hours. The Hospital, Neville Manor Nursing Home and Neighborhood Health Centers will be tested next, then other public buildings.

In regard to who should test their homes the present recommendations are that all homes be tested. Information to the public based on Massachusetts Department of Public Health fact sheets similar to those attached are available from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 727-6214. We are also ordering a supply for Cambridge. The feasibility of designing and conducting a community survey of radon levels in homes (a comprehensive radon testing program) is under consideration in conjunction with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

A forum jointly sponsored by the Department of Health and Hospitals and The Cambridge Health Policy Board is in the early stages of planning.

In regard to possible radon contamination of the water supply Mr. Cusack, Cambridge Water Department is sending a reply. In general that problem is more likely to be seen in wells bored into uranium, radium containing rock rather than in large bodies of surface water such as Hobbs Brook, Stony Brook and Fresh Pond.

Yours sincerely,

Melvin H. Chalfen, M.D.
Commissioner

MHC:vls



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MASSACHUSETTS

WATER DEPARTMENT
250 FRESH POND PARKWAY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 02138

617-498-9070

TO: Robert W. Healy
City Manager

FROM:  John J. Cusack, Jr.
Superintendent

DATE: December 9, 1988

SUBJECT: COUNCIL ORDER #6 - (9-19-88) - RADON

In response to the Council Order referenced above, please be advised that the Water Dept. has reviewed this item and is submitting this progress.

Background

The Water Dept. is required by the Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Quality Engineering (D.E.Q.E.) to sample and test water for radionuclides. This water quality monitoring program for radionuclides was initiated in the late 1970's pursuant to the State "Drinking Water Regulations" (310 C.M.R. - Section 22.09). The radionuclides tested for include: radium-226, radium-228, gross alpha and beta particle activity, and photon activity. All test results have been well below the maximum contaminant levels established by D.E.Q.E. Under the present regulations for radionuclides, testing for uranium and radon are not required.

Radon

Under the new requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1986, water systems will also have to test for uranium and radon. No maximum contaminant levels have been established to date. It is anticipated that the U.S.E.P.A. will set the new maximum contaminant level for radon-222 @ 160 pico-curies/liter.

Radon is considered a potential health hazard because of its effects on lungs. It is not considered a significant health hazard through ingestion of drinking water, but it can contribute to the overall airborne concentration of radon inside buildings or homes.

The technical literature on the subject of radon in water supplies indicates that this particular radionuclide is found more frequently in ground water supplies than in surface water supplies. Cambridge has a surface water supply system. Radon is not considered a significant risk in surface water systems, because it is quite volatile and is released to the atmosphere in the form of gas. In addition, radon has a short half-life of 3.8 days. The average residence time of water in the Cambridge water supply reservoirs is estimated at one year.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

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December 9, 1988

The Water Dept. has conferred with the D.E.Q.E. Division of Water Supply on this issue. The information from that agency is that no specific testing is advised at this time because of the characteristics of the Cambridge water supply system, specifically: surface water supply reservoirs, conventional water treatment process at Fresh Pond, and large distribution system throughout the City. Each of these factors contribute to the continuous reduction of radon, if it existed, because of the inherent volatility of the element.

Eventhough there is no indication of radon existing in the water supply, the Water Dept. will conduct a sampling and testing program for this particular radio-nuclide to establish base line data to compare existing conditionsnto any future changes.

JJC/mp

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OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

ROBERT W. HEALY

City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

December 12, 1988

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report No. 20 regarding testing for radon in public buildings and the water supply, I submit the attached reports from the Commissioner of Health and Health and Hospitals and the Superintendent of the Water Department.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy", is written over a horizontal line.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

Agenda Item No. 5 *S-78*

Re; testing for radon in public buildings
& the water supply.

In City Council,

December 12, 1988

12-12-88

Placed on file