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5 Most Dangerous Hazards in a Home

Home owners beware: Several dangers may lurk in a home. If you're not careful, they could make you sick. Pillar to Post, a home inspection company, reviews how to spot these dangers in the home and encourages you to contact a home inspector if your home may be at risk for any of these potential dangers.

1. Radon: a colorless, odorless gas that can seep into the home from the ground. Radon has been called the second most common cause of lung cancer.

What to look for: Basements or anything with protrusion into the ground offer entry points for radon. The Environmental Protection Agency publishes a map of high prevalence areas for radon (www.epa.gov/radon). A radon test can determine if high levels of radon are present.

2. Asbestos: a fibrous material once popular in building materials because it provides heat insulation and fire resistance. But asbestos was banned in 1985. It may still be found in older home's insulation materials, floor tiles, roof coverings, and siding. If disturbed or damaged, it can enter the air and cause severe illness.

What to look for: Homes built prior to 1985 are at risk of having asbestos within construction materials. Home owners should especially be careful when remodeling because disturbing insulation may cause the asbestos to become airborne.

3. Lead: a toxic metal used in home products for many years that can contribute to several health problems, especially among children. Exposure can occur from deteriorating lead-based paint, pipes, or lead-contaminated dust or soil.

What to look for: Homes built prior to 1978 may have lead present. Look for peeling paint and check old pipes. To get a HUD-insured loan, buyers must show a certificate that homes built prior to 1978 are lead-safe.

4. Hazardous products: stockpiles of hazardous household items — such as paint solvents, pesticides, fertilizers, or motor oils — that can create a dangerous situation if not properly stored or disposed. They can cause illness or even death if small amounts are ingested.

What to look for: Make sure these items aren't tucked away in corners, crawl spaces, garages, or garden sheds. Home owners often don't realize these products can pose a danger and may forget they're storing them. But buyers don't want it to become their problem — and expense — to dispose of. If these products are found, make sure the buyer requires their removal and gets a disposal certificate prior to closing, which proves the products were disposed of properly and not just dumped in the backyard.

5. Groundwater contamination: the result of hazardous chemicals that are illegally disposed of and then seep through the soil and enter water supplies. A leaking underground oil tank or faulty septic system can contribute to this.

What to look for: Look for any conditions that may be conducive to leakage. Homes near light industrial areas or facilities may be at risk. Also a concern: areas once used for industry that are now residential. Pillar to Post offers a Neighborhood Environmental Report that details any dangers or remedies of environmental incidences and sources of contamination that have occurred at a specified address and within its vicinity.

Source: Pillar to Post, www.pillartopost.com