NDMA
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Senate Industry and Business Committee
SB 2204
January 22, 2025

Good afternoon,
Chairman Barta, Vice Chair Boehm, and Committee Members. My name is Stephanie Dahl. I am a physician and president of the North Dakota Medical Association. The North Dakota Medical Association is a professional membership organization for North Dakota physicians, residents, and medical students. NDMA supports SB 2204.

I am board-certified physician in both Reproductive Endocrinology & Infertility, and OB/Gyn, and I earned my medical degree from the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences. As the NDMA president, it is one of my goals to increase awareness of health harms caused by elevated radon in homes.

Radon is a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that seeps into homes and buildings and causes serious health problems. The EPA lists North Dakota as Zone 1, meaning it has the highest risk level for elevated radon. In fact, North Dakota has some of the highest radon levels in the nation. Despite its severity, many people aren't aware of radon and its potential health implications.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer deaths in the United States, and it kills more people than home fires, drowning, falls or drunk driving. Think of how many homes have smoke detectors, but few have radon detectors. Radon is the most common cause of lung cancer in people who have never smoked, and the rate of lung cancer is increasing, particularly in younger women who have never smoked.

Most people are stunned by these statistics. Radon awareness and the harm it causes is lacking among North Dakotans. Through personal experience, I am deeply committed to helping increase awareness about the harm caused by radon.

About two years ago – through a routine x-ray – a 13-millimeter lung nodule presented itself on the x-ray. My physician did not take the results lightly and expressed concerns about lung cancer. He asked if my home had been tested for radon. Our home was tested for radon in 2016, and our levels were high, so we installed a mitigation system.

A further consultation with a thoracic surgeon said my risk of lung cancer hovered at 85 percent when considering the size of the lung nodule. I was speechless. I never smoked in my life, so lung cancer wasn't something I worried about. I never even thought about the risks of radon.

My mind began to race since I spent hundreds of hours downstairs on a treadmill training for a marathon. Even more importantly, I was concerned about my family's health since my children spent considerable time in the lower level of our home where radon levels were the highest.

I ultimately required a lung resection to remove the nodule, but thankfully the pathology results showed the cells were not cancerous. However, the scare served as a wake-up call. A follow-up

home radon test showed that our home was within the safe level, but our lake home where we spent many summer weekends was elevated, even though a passive mitigation system had been installed when the house was built. So, we installed an active mitigation system there.

As I shared my experience with family members, friends, and neighbors, I learned that many had never tested their homes for radon and was shocked by the number of people who had never heard of radon, especially because ND has the second highest levels of radon in the country.

The association between radon and lung cancer is clear. Radon is the most common cause of lung cancer after smoking, and the rates of lung cancer in young women who have never smoked is rising. Women in their 30s in 40s who have never smoked are developing radon-associated lung cancer. A radon level of 20, which is common in ND, is the equivalent of smoking two packs of cigarettes per day. There are houses in ND that have documented levels of 200, which would be the equivalent of smoking 20 packs per day. Studies have also linked radon exposure to other serious health conditions including strokes, Alzheimer's disease, asthma, complications during pregnancy such as preeclampsia and gestational diabetes, and male factor infertility.

We need to educate all North Dakotans about the risks of radon and the importance of testing their homes and installing mitigation if their levels are high, especially people who are exercising in their basements and families who have children sleeping in basements. So, if you have not had your basement tested, please do. And encourage your friends and family members to have their basements tested. Radon detectors are cheap, and the costs of radon mitigation can be covered by some health savings accounts.

North Dakota is one of the few states that has no laws regarding radon testing or disclosure. So, on behalf of NDMA, I urge a DO PASS on SB 2204. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Dahl, MD FACOG
President, North Dakota Medical Association

This Radon Public Service Announcement provides more information:
https://youtu.be/ITc0hQ0XKQM?si=sR78eI-BE_V8qBe3