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Consensus Building Among State Health and Environmental Officials Nationwide: Granite Countertops Do Not Pose a Health Risk to Consumers

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CLEVELAND, Sept 02, 2008 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- To clear up consumer confusion about the safety of granite countertops, a growing number of environmental and health agencies from states across the U.S. have issued new statements that all conclude that granite countertops typically found in homes do not pose a health risk to consumers.

Perplexed by inaccurate science and misleading statements about granite, radon and radioactivity reported in the media in recent weeks, consumers are contacting health and environmental agencies in their respective states for reassurance about the safety of granite countertops in their homes. In response, several agencies have issued statements that conclude that granite countertops do not place consumers' health at risk.

Among the state-based health and environmental agencies that have taken a position on granite countertop safety to date are:

Florida Department of Health (FDAH), which recently posted this statement on its website: "With the concern over the radioactive risk potential of granite countertops, it is important to remember that we are always exposed to a certain level of background radiation. All granite, and most earthen materials, contain trace amounts of uranium and radium, emit gamma radiation and release radon gas. While the Florida Department of Health has never performed a study specifically designed to evaluate any health risks of granite counter tops, staff from the Florida Department of Health's (DOH) Bureau of Radiation Control and from DOH's Radon Program have had the opportunity over the years to survey various granite samples for gamma emissions, including a few granite counter tops, and have yet to find granite thought to be a significant gamma radiation hazard. The term 'significant' is used because there was measurable gamma radiation from the granite as there is always around us, just not at level of concern."

Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS), which takes a similar position on the issue. On its website, the TDSHS states: "The amount of radioactivity in most granite is quite small. While it is possible to get a measurable level of direct radiation from some granite, in general it emits less radiation than we are regularly exposed to from background radiation. These levels are so low that they are not harmful to human health."

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) points out the three most common sources of radon: "Recently, there have been several news stories regarding granite countertops potentially affecting radon levels in the home. They have resulted in an increased number of phone calls to the Radon Program and have caused some concern among residents that have granite countertops, floors and fireplaces. Radiation is all around us. Naturally-occurring radiation is present in the environment, and we are all exposed to it. The three primary sources of natural radiation are: 1) terrestrial radiation from soil and soil gases; 2) cosmic radiation from the sun and outer space; and 3) and internal radiation due to naturally-occurring radiation in the body."

North Carolina Geological Survey, whose assistant state geologist, Kenneth Taylor: says he seriously doubts radon from most natural stone counters is enough to hurt anyone. "Almost all igneous rocks have some small amount of radiation," he said.

Washington State Department of Health (WSDOH) issued a statement saying: "If the stone is properly sealed, there is little likelihood that the granite will cause a radon problem. Even if the countertop is releasing some radiation, that does not

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mean it will be a radon problem or public health concern. Based on our experience with radon and radiation issues, we would not let this be the deciding factor on whether or not to get granite countertops."

To date, no state health or environmental agency has taken a position that supports the inaccurate testing and misleading information reported in recent new stories, but at least 13 agencies are directing consumers to get information on the issue from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). EPA recently updated its position on granite countertops: "Based on existing studies, most types of granite used in countertops and other aspects of home construction are not typically known to be major contributors of radiation and radon in the average home."

These state agencies join a long list of scientific experts who have already gone on record to reassure the public that no corroborated scientific research suggests that granite countertops pose any significant health this, including:

- The American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists (AARST), whose members are experts in the field of radon testing and research.
- Dr. John McCarthy president of Environmental Health & Engineering (EHE), a public health consulting firm in suburban Boston, who has overseen more than 2,500 indoor environmental quality assessments.
- Health Physics Society (HPS), a scientific and professional organization whose members specialize in occupational and environmental radiation safety.
- Dr. L.L. Chyi, professor of geochemistry and environmental geology at the Department of Geology and Environmental Science, University of Akron.
- David Ropeick, noted author of the book "Risk," agreed with McCarthy that recent media reports are needlessly confusing consumers about the safety of granite countertops.

"Largely because of the misinformation reported by the media in the past few weeks, consumers have been needlessly concerned about the safety of their granite countertops, but as top experts on the issues, as well as national and state health and environmental agencies are stating, their concern is unfounded," said Jim Hogan, president of the Marble Institute of America. "The bottom line for consumers is this: Granite countertops are every bit as safe as they are beautiful, durable and practical."

About the Marble Institute of America

For over 60 years the Marble Institute of America (MIA) has been the world's leading information resource and advocate for the natural dimension stone industry. MIA members include marble, granite, limestone, sandstone, and other natural stone producers and quarriers, fabricators, installers, distributors, and contractors around the world.

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