

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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EXTENSION

Give ENERGY STAR Products this Holiday Season

Written by Jackie E. Ogden, CFCS, Chatham County Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent



Georgia Healthy Housing
one change many impacts

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Holiday Pet Safety Tip

Keep your pets safely away from tree lights. They may like to chew on cords and lights.



Image source: Pamela Turner

This holiday season is the perfect time to look for the Energy Star symbol when making purchases such as holiday lights. A string of ENERGY STAR certified LED lights will save you energy and money during this holiday season. Did you know that a decorative light string that has earned the ENERGY STAR designation uses approximately 70% less energy than an incandescent light string? During the holiday season, choose ENERGY STAR certified electronics, appliances and so much more. Your gifts will have the latest features and save energy and money. Your gift keeps on giving into 2025.



The blue ENERGY STAR label provides simple, credible, and unbiased research-based information that consumers can rely on to make well-informed purchases. The Energy Star program provides energy efficiency specifications on specific products including appliances, building products, heating and cooling equipment, lighting, office equipment, and electronics. Products that earn the ENERGY STAR label meet strict energy-efficiency specifications that have been set by the EPA. Products must be third-party certified against strict performance requirements. This certification by EPA guarantees products are energy efficient and verified to save energy while making cost-saving energy measures over the lifetime use of the product.

The ENERGY STAR program began in 1992 and has grown to become the international standard for energy efficiency. Each year, EPA evaluates newly developed products to determine if energy efficiency standards meet with quality. In 2023, updates to the ENERGY STAR categories included residential gas water heaters, commercial ovens, dishwashers, room air conditioners, windows, heat pumps, and central air conditioners. During 2024, product categories were updated to include residential electric cooking products, commercial electric cooktops, and downlights.

If you are thinking about a new ENERGY STAR certified refrigerator, then you will want to maximize your energy dollar savings and get all the features for your home. These refrigerators are about 9 % more energy efficient and will save \$230 over the 12-year lifetime of the product. Energy savings result primarily from a high-efficiency compressor and improved insulation. If an electric cooker is on your list, select an ENERGY STAR model that is up to 18% more efficient than a standard model.

Choose from the variety of ENERGY STAR products that make great gifts! Visit www.energystar.gov/products/holiday to learn more about what makes these items great plus special deals and tax rebates. Also, learn how to recycle the appliances you are replacing.

Radon is a Health Problem with a Solution

Written by Stephanie Benton, Early County Extension Coordinator and Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent

Radon is something that we rarely hear about; however, it is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Does this sound concerning to you? It should motivate you to learn more about radon, where it comes from and how to test for it in your home. This knowledge will help you to be proactive in ensuring your home is safe from high levels of radon.

What is radon? It's a gas that you cannot see, smell or taste. It comes from the decay of radioactive elements (such as uranium, thorium and radium) in soil and groundwater.

Why should you be concerned about radon? Research indicates one out of every 15 homes in the U.S. is likely to have a high level of radon. Breathing radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Radon-induced lung cancer is the likely cause of around 820 deaths each year in Georgia and 21,000 deaths each year in the U.S. Radon causes cancer by the radon gas decaying into radioactive particles that can get trapped in your lungs when you breathe. These particles break down and release small bursts of energy, damaging lung tissue and leading to lung cancer over the course of your lifetime. Not everyone exposed to high levels of radon will develop lung cancer; however, the risk for developing lung cancer is increased.


How does radon get into a home or building? Radon is a gas rising from the rocks in the ground, through the soil, and into the air above. Radon enters your home through cracks and holes in the foundation. It can become trapped in a new or old house or building, whether it has a basement, crawlspace, or slab foundation. Radon can also be found in multi-family and high-rise buildings. In addition, underground well water contaminated with radon can release radon gas into the house when you are using the water for activities such as laundry or showers.

How can you tell if your house has high levels of radon? The only way to know the radon level in your home is to test. Your local county Extension office may be able to provide you with a test kit for a small fee, or you can purchase one online at radon.uga.edu. Another option is to visit your local public library and check out a digital testing device. At radon.uga.edu you can learn more about testing your well water for radon.


The amount of radon in the air is measured in "picocuries per liter of air," or "pCi/L." A radon level in your home between 2 and 4 pCi/L is considered moderate risk and over 4 pCi/L is considered high risk for your health. If your home or well water indicates high levels of radon, it is recommended that you hire a contractor who has professional training in how to install radon reduction systems. According to the CDC, "the most common system is the vent pipe system and fan, which pulls radon from beneath the house and vents it to the outside, known as the depressurization system." The objective is to keep a good flow of air going through the home. Using fans and opening windows are a good way of keeping fresh air flow. Also, check your home for ways that radon can come into the home such as through cracks and holes being sure to fill them in with caulk or a sealant.

Worried about the impacts on the sale of a home that has had a radon reduction system installed? It is not unusual for national home building companies to install Radon Resistant New Construction in their new homes. Having a radon system in your home reduces serious health risks and means that you are selling a "healthy home."


Radon can be the cause of serious health issues; however, it is a problem with a solution. Visit the UGA Extension radon website to see what the radon levels are in your county.




Do you know why it's important to test your home for radon?



1 in 15 homes tests high for radon levels



Radon is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer, causing 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year



Among non-smokers, radon is the #1 cause of lung cancer

www.epa.gov/radon



Give the Gift of Safety

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist

As you purchase gifts now and throughout the year, give gifts that contribute to the health and safety of the people you care about. There are many gift ideas that do not cost a lot and encourage safe behaviors. Here are some ideas to get you thinking.

- Everyone can use a pair of slippers with non-skid bottoms
- Rechargeable flashlight or lantern with a charging port
- Fire extinguisher or fire spray for the kitchen
- Small home security camera
- Multiuse tool
- Set of miniature screwdrivers
- Solar-power lights for the walkway and steps
- Motion activated LED lights for stairs and hallways
- Grab-it tool to help reach things on high shelves and in hard to reach areas
- Non-slip ducks or tub tattoos are fun and keep people of all ages from falling in the bathtub or shower
- Silicon potholders or an oven glove
- A unique doormat makes a useful gift and helps reduce tracking in of lead dust and other contaminants
- To encourage financial safety, give an “estate planning kit” with some money to help pay for an attorney so the person can get a will. Include a coupon to help the person begin downsizing their possessions.



(Image Source: pixabay)

You don't have to always buy something new. If you have items that you no longer need or use and they are still in good condition, why not pass them along. For example, if you have an extra vase, fill it with flowers or greenery from your yard, and add a ribbon. It's a thoughtful gift and reduces the clutter in your home. An empty tin or mug can be filled with candy, cookies or even something healthy.

If your funds are limited, give a service coupon for things like decluttering, organizing, cleaning, car washes and repairs, home safety inspection, home maintenance, yardwork, fix-it projects, cooking, etc. You can add a small pass along gift. To save on paper use a towel for wrapping paper. Or try a version of [Furoshiki](#), a cool Japanese fabric wrapping technique.



(Image Source: pixabay)



(Images Source: Freepik)

Happy Holidays!



Safety Tips for the Holidays

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist



Image source: Pamela Turner

It is easy to feel overwhelmed during the holidays. With a little organization and some delegation, everyone can enjoy the busy season. Assign one person to cover each of the tasks below. Double-up if you have a small household. The household of one gets to oversee everything!

Safety official: This person is in charge of keeping walkways and porches free of leaves and debris, and making sure pathways are well lit. They also secure extension cords and remove objects that could be a tripping or falling hazard.

Keeper of the light: This person is in charge of making sure that no candles or fires are burning when everyone goes to bed or leaves the house. They also keep at least three feet around the fireplace free from combustibles.

Keeper of the tree: This person is responsible for making sure the tree is watered (if it is a live tree). They also pick up fallen decorations and make sure the tree and outdoor lights are turned off when everyone goes to bed or leaves the house.

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Pamela Turner, UGA Extension Housing and Indoor Environment Specialist
~ Diane Bales, UGA Extension Human Development Specialist

Clean your kitchen sponge regularly to remove bacteria. Microwave the sponge for 30 seconds (and remove carefully, because it will be hot), or wash the sponge in the dishwasher.

Add doormats to trap dirt and reduce tracking in by around 60%. You need two doormats—one outside the exterior door and one inside. Be sure to clean the mats regularly.

Unblock air vents to remove dust and let heat flow. A quick way to remove dust from the air vents is with a soft vacuum brush tool. If that doesn't work, soak a rag with water and a little dish soap. Wrap it around a butter knife and use it to clean the vents.

Remove finger marks from stainless steel with a dab of baby oil on a clean cloth. Rub the surface and watch the fingerprints vanish.



UGA Extension [Healthy Indoor Environments](https://healthyhomes.uga.edu)
(healthyhomes.uga.edu)



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