



Transcript: Healthy Homes
Interview with Francesca Provenzano
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Narrator: Public health is in every corner of our homes. It's in the safe food in our fridge, the carbon monoxide and smoke detectors on our ceilings and the child-safe containers that help keep dangerous chemicals away from our little ones. Housing conditions also play a role in the health of a home. I'm here today with Francesca Provenzano to talk about the Connecticut Department of Public Health's Healthy Homes Program.

Hi Fran, can you tell us a little bit about the Healthy Homes Program?

Fran: Sure. To start, sometimes I always think of the Healthy Homes Program as more an initiative. The reason is that, really for us at the Department of Public Health, we're all interested in people's health. And a group of our programs go together with a shared vision that every Connecticut resident lives in a healthy and safe home environment. As well all sat down and started discussing it to coordinate our activities within our department, we realized it was much larger than us. So today, in 2013, we started this back in 2008, so when you look at five years later, we have really actually pushed for partnerships with private industry, non-profits, other state agencies, and our federal agency partners as well. So, it's a pretty massive initiative at this point.

Narrator: What are some of the environmental hazards that can exist in a home?

Fran: There are lots of different hazards. There are ones that exist in your home, there are ones that you sometimes bring in, and then there are other ones that you actually create. So to give you an idea of contaminants that may already be there, if you live in an older home built before 1978 you may have lead, similarly older homes may have asbestos-containing materials. Formaldehyde from insulation, carpeting, furniture, draperies. You also may have water contaminants if you have a private well for instance. People who are on public water systems tend not to have to worry about that, it's handled by our Drinking Water Section. If you think about hazards you bring into the home, maybe things like smokers bringing in second-hand smoke and all the chemicals associated with that. Pests. Pet dander. Things your pet track in. And also just little things, like cords running that people trip and fall on and those create injuries. And then separately, we always have those housing-related issues like fire hazards or moisture which creates mold, things of that nature as well, and smoke inhalation, carbon monoxide from our combustion appliances.

Narrator: That seems like so much to worry about. How can someone know everything to be aware of in their home?

Fran: I do this full-time, and I'm not aware of everything in my home in terms of hazards. I think that's important to emphasize. What we try to do at the DPH is simplify what people need to look at. We

came up with seven principles of a healthy home, the federal government also has them, and I can run through those with you. In basic terms, when you're living in a home, renting a home, it doesn't matter, there are certain things you should have in place. You should keep it dry, keep it clean, keep it ventilated, keep it safe, keep it well-maintained, contaminant-free, and pest free. And if you think about each of those things, they overlap a little bit, in terms of hazards that may be created in your home, but those seven principles pretty much cover everything.

Narrator: Now, what are some things we can do to help make our home healthier? Are there any steps that we can take or tests that we can have done in our homes?

Fran: There are lots of little things, I think, behaviorally that people can do to make their home environment a little safer. I talked about second-hand smoke. So, if you are a smoker, smoking outdoors is an option. Bringing in all of those chemicals and contaminants doesn't help any. Keeping your home clean, which sounds crazy, but, hey, full-time working mom right here, it takes a lot of effort to keep a home clean, but if you can keep dirt from getting tracked in, come up with a cleaning schedule for yourself, put foods away in sealed containers, keep chemicals out of reach of your children, all of those basic little behavioral changes really do contribute to a healthy home.

When you talk about testing, I'm a little torn, I have to be honest about it. We license most of the environmental professionals. They're wonderful, they're very professional staff. They do a great job in terms of analysis and testing of different contaminants in homes, but I always say that the best tests are your own eyeballs and your own nose. If you smell a problem or you see a problem, then there is a problem, and testing isn't necessary in most circumstances. You may WANT to test if you're planning a renovation for your home or you have to fix an issue, something is falling apart or isn't maintained and you may need to disturb surfaces, in which case, there are some tests you can do. For instance, for lead-based paint, for asbestos-containing materials or for radon. For asbestos and lead, you really need to hire a licensed professional, in order to find out any sort of reliable results. For something like radon, you can go to a hardware store or you can call the American Lung Association at 1-800-LUNG-USA, and get a really low-cost test kit. In terms in testing for something like mold or other type of unknown contaminants, we typically don't recommend that. Mold is caused by moisture, so finding the source of moisture is actually more important. And then separate from that, we do recommend that well owners get onto a regular schedule for testing their own private well water, so that they're aware of their water quality and what their bringing into their home, drinking and using for cooking.

Narrator: And in addition to the standard well test that they do now, the Department of Public Health is also recommending that private well owners test for arsenic and uranium as well, correct?

Fran: That is correct. One of our programs, Environmental Epidemiology, has recently issued a fact sheet on that very issue.

Narrator: Now what about carbon monoxide detectors or fire/smoke detectors? Are those good things to have in the house?

Fran: Oh, absolutely! They're not only good things, but if you're living in a rented dwelling, they're required things to have installed in your home. And that's something that you don't really want to fidget with if you're somebody who's a resident living in a rental property. If you're a homeowner, you should also have them in there, too. We typically recommend and provide guidance to people that, "Hey, when you're filling up your stockings during Christmas time or over the holidays, include for your family members a CO detector or batteries or a new smoke detector, even." Smoke detectors do have a life, so changing those out at least every ten years minimally, really goes a long way.

Narrator: Thanks, Fran! These are just a few of the ways to make your home healthy. Your health starts at home. By making your home a healthy home, it helps to make you a healthy you. For more information about having a healthy home, please visit our website at www.ct.gov/dph/healthyhomes or call (860) 509-7740.

It's National Public Health Week. Remember, public health is ROI: Return on Investment. Save Lives, Save Money.