

Extension Programs Help Create Safe and Healthy Living Environments

Safe living conditions are a major part of health and wellness that most take for granted. Indoor air and water quality issues, for example, are often unseen but can be extremely harmful to health when not addressed. Severe weather, especially for those without adequate housing, is a major safety concern. Often there are simple ways to reduce issues, and Extension programs are on the frontlines of bringing information and resources to keep people safe and healthy.

Here are a few examples of that work:

- Following a major earthquake in **Alaska** in 2018, residents became aware of radon concerns. They were encouraged to test for leaks due to new potential subsurface pathways for the radioactive gas — a leading cause of lung cancer in Americans — to enter their homes. Extension specialists worked with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources to distribute nearly 1,000 complimentary test kits (19% showed radon levels in excess of the EPA's action level). Specialists also provided technical assistance via calls received from the Alaska Radon Hotline and at state fairs, conference booths and workshops.
- In **Virginia**, nearly 25% of the population rely on private water supply systems, such as wells, springs or cisterns, for their household water, and are personally responsible for routine testing, systems maintenance and addressing water-quality issues. Virginia Cooperative Extension agents and university faculty provide confidential water testing and educate private water-supply users through county-based drinking water clinics as part of the Virginia Household Water Quality Program. In 2021, their busiest year ever, they tested 2,785 samples from private water supplies, with 37% of survey respondents sharing detailed action they undertook as a result of the testing and education.

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Nutrition and Health

- Those without reliable housing are among the most vulnerable in severe weather, including severe cold, extreme winds, flooding and extreme heat — and incidences of extreme weather are only increasing. In **Connecticut**, Extension educators helped this population through more than 400 interactions by discussing specific ways to deal with severe storms, giving them more control and planning ahead to feel more secure when severe weather approaches.