Old Guys Still Rule!

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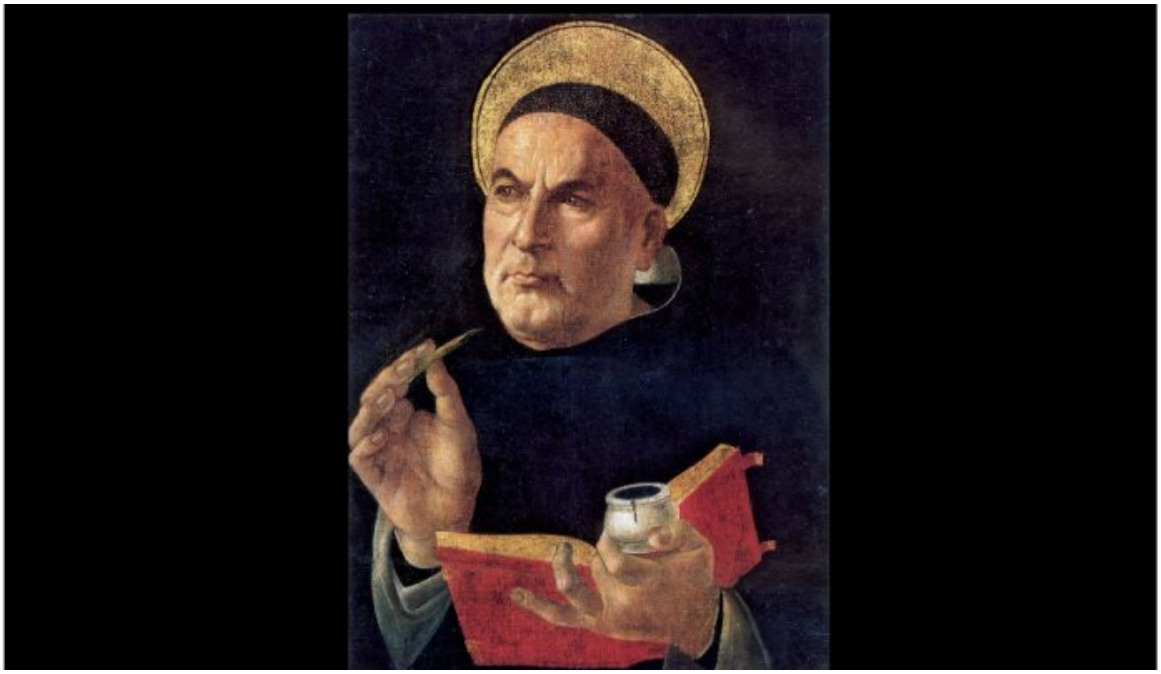

ONE of the most common comments I receive regarding my discussion on radon in the residential environment (Radon - A Brief Discussion) is that the references in the article are "old."

Usually, these comments come from someone who hasn't actually read the article but still want to find a reason to criticize it, or otherwise don't actually know about the epidemiological history of radon and choose to know even less.

Ignoring for a moment that many of the references in the article are quite recent, consider this: I have a readily available textbook on my shelf titled "*Handbook of Noise Control*" (Harris, 1957). This classic 1,000 page textbook is as valid today, as the day Dr. Harris published the book.

Also on my bookshelf is Rinehart's 1943 "*Mathematical Tables, Formulas and Curves*" (Larson). I reference that book several times a year.

Also included in my standard reference library is Cadle's "*Measurement of Airborne Particles*" (1947); "*Pulmonary Deposition and Retention of Inhaled Particles*" (Hatch and Gross, 1964); and Wells's classic and timely "*Airborne Contagion and Air Hygiene*"

(1955). On a DAILY basis, I still reference my 1982 "*CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics.*"

Some may argue that I use these references because I'm too cheap to purchase new books every year; others may say I use them because I'm a living anachronism who is stuck in time. But however cheap and old I may be, foolish I am not, and when I grab my 1943 Rinehart's for reference, I so do because I know that none of the mathematical curves, roots, powers, trig operators, binomial reduction factors or indefinite integrals have changed since 1943 – no matter how pretty or expensive the latest mathematical text may be.

The "old" references used in my radon article are there for two reasons –

1) Those are the exact same articles that are being referenced in the field today and upon which virtually every publication on the subject published up to last week are based, and, the newer materials (also referenced in my article) build upon and validate the earlier references, and there is nothing there that contradicts the "older" references.

2) Like my Rinehart's the information in the references remain valid.

When considering current issues, it seems the general public has a kind of irrational bias against established science – if the article wasn't published in the last year, it must be outdated. As an Industrial Hygienist, I wish more IHs would return to the older publications and use them to learn something about the profession, such as the 1977 NIOSH "*Occupational Exposure Sampling Strategy Manual*" (Leidel, Busch, Lynch) – if they did, they wouldn't find themselves on the receiving end of critical reviews or court decisions that find their work is "junk science" founded on current myths instead of established science.

Math is still math, radiation is still radiation, and physiology is still physiology. While civil laws may change from month to month, and societal laws seem to change daily, the laws of nature tend to resist such change. And there is no argument to be made that "old" must necessarily equal "invalid."

> *"We can't have full knowledge all at once. We must start by believing; then afterwards we may be led on to master the evidence for ourselves." Thomas Aquinas*