



# RadonSeal

*Penetrating concrete sealer*

## Radon and Radioactivity - Facts and Controversies

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## Radon mitigation stacks - worse than Chernobyl?

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## Quick Answers

The Chernobyl nuclear accident has created a "dead zone" almost the size of Switzerland for generations to come. Its intense heat of 3,600 °F evaporated 8 tons of nuclear fuel. The explosion and fire ejected radioactive graphite and dust into the atmosphere, releasing 400 times more radioactivity than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Winds spread radioactive iodine and cesium over most of the Northern Hemisphere. The total radioactive release out of the bounds of Chernobyl is estimated at 50 million Curies.

EPA estimates that 6 - 8 million homes exceed the "action limit" of 4 pCi/L. What if all these homeowners installed fan-based radon mitigation? Underground radon levels, ranging from 200 to 2,000 pCi/L, average 1,000 pCi/L. Using a 70 cfm fan, the typical radon stack emits 1 Curie of radioactivity per year (equivalent to 1 gram of radium). The total radioactivity released each year by all these radon stacks would amount to 6 - 8 million Curies. This is comparable to a Chernobyl-size nuclear disaster occurring in the U.S. every seven years! Moreover, the radon stacks would be concentrated in populated areas. Radon gas, being 8 times heavier than air (like steel versus water), tends to settle near the house. While the radioactive iodine from Chernobyl decayed in days, the decay of radon's radioactive products into stable lead takes over 22 years.

(Comment: It is always better to mitigate. Radon in homes causes each year many more deaths in the U.S. alone than the estimated total of Chernobyl. However, it is preferable to use mitigation methods, which leave radon gas in the ground.)

## Radon potions for your health!

A San Francisco company ushered in a craze in radioactive health crocks in 1912, when it was granted a patent for "Revigorator". This device saturated water with radon and people were advised to drink six or more glasses each day. "Radithor", a quack radon potion to cure sexual dysfunction and everything else, was introduced in 1925. After several years, people started dying of the effects of this potion. The manufacturer and user of Radithor died 14 years later of bladder cancer. No warnings to the public were ever issued.

Hundreds of thousands of health-conscious Americans drank bottled water laced with radium as a general elixir, known popularly as "liquid sunshine." Soon, radioactive toothpaste was marketed, then radioactive skin cream. Chocolate bars containing radium were sold as a "rejuvenator." As recently as 1952, LIFE magazine wrote about the beneficial effects of inhaling radioactive radon gas in Montana mines.

Even today, people visit the radon-filled mines and report multiple benefits. However, numerous studies have concluded that the only demonstrable health effect of inhaling radon is lung cancer.

## The discovery of radon in homes

In 1984, the scientific world woke up to the existence of radon in homes. A construction engineer triggered radiation alarms while entering the Limerick nuclear power plant near Philadelphia. His home in Boyertown was tested and the radon concentration was a shocking 2,700 pCi/L.

The family, including small children, was immediately evacuated. Very high radon levels were also found in nearby houses. This region, known as the Reading Prong, has low-grade uranium deposits and encompasses parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics - [The radon record](#).



## Avoid radioactive rain from radon clouds!

Workers entering the Super Collider at the Argonne National Laboratory near Chicago used to trigger radioactivity alarms when it rained. It was discovered that rainwater deposited on their shoes and hands radioactive decay products of radon. The laboratory developed special radiation monitors to detect the specific gamma rays emitted by radon progeny in rain clouds. During the first year of operation the alarm was triggered nine times. Since the radon alarms occurred simultaneously at two monitors approximately 1,000 meters apart, it proved that large radon-saturated clouds are regularly passing over populated areas. It confirmed that radon released by wastes from uranium mines in the West can travel hundreds of miles across America.

Source: *Health Physics*, November 1999

Radioactive rain had also exposed the Chernobyl nuclear accident, kept secret by the Soviet government. After the radioactive cloud reached Sweden, workers triggered radioactivity alarms when entering a nuclear plant.

## Government disputes the dangers of radioactivity



About 600,000 workers were exposed to radioactive materials in 14 nuclear weapons plants since the beginning of the Manhattan Project. Their radiation exposure was within the official "safety limits". However, increased rates of leukemia, cancers, vision difficulties, chronic fatigue syndrome and other health problems have been observed. The identified 22 types of cancers include cancer of the lung, prostate, bladder, kidney, and Hodgkin's lymphoma. Some scientists believe that radiation damages the human immune system, leaving people vulnerable to a wide range of other diseases.

Until 1999, the U.S. government disputed reports that low-level ionizing radiation is harmful. DOE and DOD waged media campaigns against "fear mongers" and spent tens of millions of dollars on lawyers. Then, after decades of denials, the government finally conceded that the radiation exposure to workers at nuclear weapons plants caused a wide range of cancers. President Clinton apologized to the "heroes of the nuclear age." But by then, many have died. The US Congress agreed to pay out \$150.000 to the sick survivors, but denied them unlimited healthcare. Although private companies ran many of these plants for profit, the U.S. taxpayers will pick up the tab.

Source: The New York Times, January 29, 2000

(Comments: There is no plan to change the old safety limits. Paying out compensation is much more cost-effective than lowering the limits throughout the nuclear complex. However, the radiation exposure of the average worker over several years of employment is lower than the cumulative exposure of an average person from radon in his or her home.)

## **The radiation craze of the last century**

Within months after Wilhem Roentgen donated x-rays to the world in 1895, medical doctors used it on patients for all possible ailments. (Antibiotics had not been discovered yet.) The early x-ray machines imparted huge doses. There was no reason to expect any harm from this miracle of modern science. Then, fluoroscopes were invented to provide "x-ray movies", multiplying the radiation dose. Until 1950's, radiologists tested the set-up of a x-ray machine by holding a hand in front of it to observe how soon it gets red. Many doctors developed radiation burns or even lost their fingers, but they did not start dying of cancer until decades later.

Radon expanded the radiation arsenal when radium became widely available. It is vented off a piece of radium. Radon gas emits gamma

rays (just like x-rays but more energetic) and in addition, alpha and beta particles. Medical Life magazine claimed in 1925 that radon treatment cured at least 27 illnesses. Radiation was prescribed for heart trouble, cancer, arthritis, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, blindness, back problems, herpes, bronchial asthma, peptic ulcers, and impotence.

Embryos received x-ray doses already in the womb during abdominal exams. Newborns were routinely treated by x-rays for prevention. Pediatricians used to fluoroscope babies and young children every month and during annual checkups. Many children were given massive radiation treatment for an invented disorder - enlargement of the thymus gland in the upper chest. The scalps of 10,000 New York children were irradiated to make their hair fall out as a treatment for ringworm. Depression in women was cured by irradiating the ovaries and excessive bleeding of girls during menstruation by x-rays to the uterus. Primitive mammography caused the breast cancer epidemic decades later.

Mass screenings of children for tuberculosis in the 50's sent buses with crude x-ray machines to schools throughout the country. Fluoroscopes became the fad for fitting shoes in stores. Doctors and beauty shops used radiation for acne and unwanted hair or freckles. Dermatologists used x-ray treatments until the 70's. These deadly practices were not stopped by our government, but only by negative publicity in newspapers.

## **Have doctors caused our cancers and heart diseases?**

Until 1920's, lung cancer was extremely rare. When a physician discovered a case, all interns were called, because they would not see another case for years to come. The lung cancer epidemic in the second half of the century increased the lung cancer rate from 4 in 100,000 people to 72 in 100,000 in 1990. Coronary heart diseases also increased dramatically.

Dr. John Gofman, a prominent radiologist who helped to build the first nuclear bombs, concluded that medical irradiation has caused most of the cancers and coronary heart diseases in the twentieth century. He studied mortality rates from 1940 to 1990 of the entire U.S. population. He found that the mortality rates for cancers and coronary heart disease increase proportionally to the number of physicians per 100,000 people in each region, while all other diseases decrease. More physicians in a region means more x-rays to its population. In the case of coronary heart disease, the cause appears to be radiation-induced mutations in the

coronary arteries.

Statistical analysis shows that medical irradiation has caused over a half of all cancers, two thirds of coronary heart diseases, and over 80% of breast cancers in the US. Dr. Gofman stresses that the radiation from each medical or dental x-ray can be reduced several-fold without sacrificing accuracy. All x-ray machines should be regularly tested and calibrated, and the doses measured. People should refuse unnecessary x-rays.

John W. Gofman, M.D., Ph.D. 1999: [Radiation from Medical Procedures in the Pathogenesis of Cancer and Ischemic Heart Disease](#)

## See alpha particle in action!

To see a photograph of the tracks of an alpha particle in lungs [click here!](#)

## The "anti-smoking Nazis"!

Smokers who call intolerant non-smokers "Nazis" are not entirely wrong. Adolf Hitler, just like Mussolini and Franco, was a non-smoker and personally directed anti-smoking campaigns.

German scientists recognized already in 1930's, decades ahead of others, that smoking causes lung cancer. Nazis founded the "National Socialist Institute for the Study of the Dangers of Tobacco" with the mission to protect the mankind against one of its most dangerous poisons. Smoking was branded as socially undesirable and was forbidden in many public places. Tobacco advertising was strictly regulated and athletically or sexually oriented cigarette advertising was prohibited. Smokers, who frequently missed work due to sickness, were forced into nicotine withdrawal clinics. Western agents sent to Nazi Germany had to first sand off tobacco stains from their fingers to avoid detection.

Source: Robert N. Proktor - "The Nazi War on Cancer"

## Radioactive fallout from uranium mines

About a ton of ore is required to extract two pounds of uranium. Huge quantities of pulverized rock (uranium tailings) are left over from the milling process. They contain thorium, radium, and all the other

uranium by-products, retaining 85 per cent of the ore's original radioactivity. They give off at least 10,000 times as much radon gas as the undisturbed ore. Radon atoms produced inside hard rock have a low chance to escape from the grain, but when the rock is pulverized, radon gas escapes easily.

Each uranium mine is spreading radioactive poisons over vast areas of the earth, as the Chernobyl disaster or atmospheric nuclear tests have done, but at a slower rate. With only a light breeze, radon gas can travel a thousand miles in a few days. As it travels low to the ground, being 8 times heavier than air, it deposits its "daughters" - solid radioactive fallout - on the vegetation, soil and water below. These radioactive particles enter the food chain, ending up in fruits and berries, the flesh of fish and animals, and ultimately, in the bodies of human beings.

Radium dust is blown in the wind, washed by the rain, and leached from the tailings piles into waterways. It re-concentrates by factors of thousands in aquatic plants and by factors of hundreds in land plants. A front page article in the Wall Street Journal (February 25, 1986) described the 220 million tons of uranium tailings in the U.S. as an ecological and financial time bomb. (Canada has about 150 million tons of the tailings.) Uranium tailings will remain dangerously radioactive for millions of years.

Source: [Uranium: The Deadliest Metal](#)

(Comment: Under the Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action Program, the Department of Energy is covering the tailings with a layer of soil, which slows down the release of radon.)

## Uranium's deadly legacy

At the gateway of one of America's most popular wilderness recreation areas lies a ticking time bomb. Colorado River, winding around Moab in Utah, carries drinking water to millions of people in Utah, Nevada, Arizona and Southern California. But it also carries radioactive contaminants.

An abandoned uranium mill near Moab has left behind 10.5 million tons of uranium tailings, which are steadily leaking toxins into the groundwater and the river. Wells in the area reveal very high radioactivity in the groundwater. Fish with elevated radioactivity levels are showing up. The tailings are also releasing large quantities of radon gas into the air. The tailings pile could be compromised by floods, erosion or seismic activity.

National Parks and Conservation Association: [Uranium's Legacy](#)

Mining companies pump chemical solutions into the ground to dissolve and wash out uranium salts, polluting underground waters with chemicals and radioactivity. Over three billion cubic feet of wastes from uranium mining still await proper disposal. These waste heaps are persistent sources of water-soluble radium salts and airborne radon gas. Thousands of tons of ore were transported for processing to areas near major population centers, like Niagara Falls, Salt Lake City, Cincinnati and Chicago. Some of the radioactive mining wastes were used to make concrete for houses, buildings and roads.

Meter Conversions, Inc: [Radioactivity detector](#)

## Radioactive homes

In the Southwest U.S. and in Port Hope, Ontario, many homes and schools were built using sand-like tailings from uranium mines as construction material. Some of these buildings ended up with radon levels higher than those permitted in mines. Similar (though less severe) radon problems arose in Florida and Newfoundland when phosphate tailings were used for construction.

Source: [Uranium: The Deadliest Metal](#)

## The saga of radium dial painters

Shortly after its discovery radium was used to make luminous paints. During World War I, hundreds of young women in New York and Illinois were applying the highly radioactive paint to instrument dials. Dial painting was expanded to clock manufacturing, and "glow-in-the-dark" clocks and watches became popular.

The young women who applied the paint frequently licked the brush to keep it pointed, and their work area was saturated in radon. Suspicions arose in the late 1920's over jaw cancers among the dial painters, and their tragic saga slowly started to unfold. Years later, most of these women died of cancer.

During World War II, young women painted radium on military instruments, so that the dials would glow in the darkness of a cockpit or battlefield. Precautions were taken to avoid the ingestion of radium, but the danger of radon gas was not understood. Cancer has killed many of these women during the following 20-30 years.

Since the mid 1960's, the watch manufacturers are using Tritium, a radioactive form of hydrogen with a half-life of 12 years, or Promethium, a man-made radioactive element with a half-life of 2.6

years. Both of these elements are weak beta and gamma emitters, but only a few of the particles penetrate the cover glass of the watch.

## Radon - the killer in tobacco

Nearly 4,000 chemicals have been found in tobacco smoke, but only two definite chemical carcinogens have been found - benzopyrene and nitrosamine. The most potent carcinogen in tobacco is radiation from the radioactive products of radon. Polonium-210 is the only component of cigarette smoke that has produced cancers by itself in laboratory animals by inhalation; tumors appear at a level five times lower than the dose to a heavy smoker.

Lung cancer rates among men kept climbing from a rarity in 1930 (4/100,000 per year) to the No. 1 cancer killer in 1980 (72/100,000) despite an almost 20 percent reduction in smoking. During the same period, the level of polonium-210 in American tobacco had tripled. This coincided with the increase in the use of phosphate fertilizers by tobacco growers. The calcium phosphate ore accumulates uranium and slowly releases radon gas. The tailings of uranium mines also released clouds of radon, which can travel for hundreds of miles.

As radon decays, its electrically charged daughter products attach themselves to dust particles which, in turn, adhere to the sticky hairs on the underside of tobacco leaves. This leaves a deposit of radioactive polonium and lead on the leaves. Then, the intense localized heat at the burning tip of a cigarette volatilizes the radioactive metals. While cigarette filters can trap chemical carcinogens, they are ineffective against radioactive vapors.

The lungs of a chronic smoker end up with a radioactive lining in a concentration much higher than from residential radon. These particles emit radiation. A person who smokes two packs of cigarettes a day receives a radiation dose of alpha particles of about 1,300 milirem per year. (*IEM*) For comparison, the annual radiation dose to the average American from inhaled radon is 200 mrem. However, the radiation dose at a higher radon level of 4 pCi/L (the EPA action limit) is roughly equivalent to smoking 10 cigarettes a day.

In addition, polonium-210 is soluble and is circulated through the body to every tissue and cell in levels much higher than from residential radon. The proof is that it can be found in the blood and urine of smokers. The circulating polonium-210 causes genetic damage and early death from diseases reminiscent of early radiological pioneers: liver and bladder cancers, stomach ulcers, leukemias, cirrhosis of liver, and cardiovascular diseases.

The Surgeon General C. Everett Koop stated that radioactivity, rather than tar, accounts for at least 90% of all smoking-related lung cancers. The Center for Disease Control concluded "Americans are exposed to far more radiation from tobacco smoke than from any other source."

Cigarette smoking accounts for 30% of all cancer deaths. Only diet rivals tobacco smoke as a cause of cancer in the U.S., causing a comparable number of fatalities each year. However, the National Cancer Institute, with an annual budget of \$500 million, has no active funding for research of radiation from smoking or residential radon as a cause of lung cancer, presumably, to protect the public from undue fears of radiation.

Dr. Gordon Edwards: [Estimating Lung Cancers](#)  
[Radioactive Polonium in Tobacco, Meat and Dairy](#)

## Russian Mafia uses radioactivity

Russian "Mafia" assassins allegedly planted pellets emitting gamma rays in the office of a Moscow businessman, killing him within months. At least half a dozen similar incidents have been reported in Russia. *Scientific American, January 1996*

## A little carcinogen may be good for you?

The government and nuclear industry financed practically all the research on dangers of nuclear radiation. The scientists obligingly produced studies that the dangers of low-level radiation could not be proven, which were then widely disseminated to the public by collaborating media. Most attacked was the Linear No-Threshold (LNT) Model, which says that there is no safe threshold for exposure to radiation. This threatened the established "safety limits". According to Prof. Cohen, the apostle of pro-nuke science, low-level exposure to radioactivity or chemical carcinogens stimulates the body's defenses against cancer. For example, increasing the radon level in homes to 5 pCi/L should reduce the lung cancer risk. His comments reveal how the radon issue is connected to much larger multi-billion dollar issues:

"If Low Level Radiation was properly recognized as harmless, it would have a vast impact on many wasteful multi-billion government programs and regulations: the clean-up of the Hanford, Savannah River, Rocky Flats, and other sites; nuclear plant safety; routine emissions of radioactivity from nuclear plants; radioactive waste storage; and

reduction of radon levels in homes. It would also make moot the issues of the 10,000 to 20,000 deaths projected from the Chernobyl accident, the fallout from nuclear bomb tests, and patients' fears of x-rays." "The simplistic LNT model has been also applied to chemical carcinogens, leading to severe restrictions on the use of cleaning fluids, organic chemicals, pesticides, etc. If the LNT model were abandoned for radon, it should be also abandoned for chemical carcinogens."

## Stimulate your natural cancer defenses!

- *Increase your radon level to 5 pCi/L - buy the pure Mountain Fresh Radon!*
- *Drink radon-enriched mineral water! (Proven effective since 1920's.)*
- *Sprinkle some asbestos, lead and arsenic around your home!*
- *Light up 12 cigarettes a day!*
- *Visit our combination tanning and x-ray health salon!*
- *Wear a genuine radium pendant just like Madame Curie!*

*(Advertisement by Radiant Tomorrows, Inc.)*

## EPA underestimates the radon danger

The linear hypothesis used by the EPA seriously underestimates the risk of lung cancer at low exposures to radon. In fact, the relative lung cancer risk increases for lower radon exposures. Alpha radiation is more effective in causing cancer at low dose rates. Higher doses cause overkill - cells that would have developed into cancer cells are instead killed. Studies of uranium miners clearly demonstrate the increasing effectiveness of radon exposure at low doses.

The gradual build-up of long-lived radon daughters in the lung, such as lead-210 with its 21-year half-life, makes it highly unlikely that extra cancers would stop appearing after 20 years. Lead-210 decays into polonium-210, whose potent carcinogenic properties are well documented. Long follow-up periods of 20-25 years among miners show that the incidence of cancers for nonsmokers sometimes exceeds that of smokers. Moreover, non-smokers who started mining at an early age begin to show dramatic increases in lung cancer some 40 or 50 years after the initial exposure.

Radon daughters, in addition to alpha and beta particles, also emit gamma rays. The health risk from exposure to the low level gamma radiation from radon includes not only cancers and genetic defects, but also possible increases in such diseases as diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, mental retardation, stroke, hypertension, and a great many infectious diseases.

Dr. Gordon Edwards: [Estimating Lung Cancers](#)

## Fallout from Nevada nuclear bomb tests

During 1951-1962, nearly 100 aboveground nuclear weapons tests were conducted in Nevada. Another dozen underground tests also leaked radioactive materials into atmosphere. Rising public concern, as well as mounting litigation, led to the atmospheric test-ban treaty of 1963. Hundreds of lawsuits had been filed against the U.S. government claiming that the nuclear tests caused illnesses, primarily cancers.

The Atomic Energy Commission had assured the public that the nuclear tests were harmless. However, the "experts" overlooked that the radioactive fallout gets into the food chain. Radioactive clouds travel hundreds of miles. After the fallout rains on grass, feeding cattle produces radioactive milk. This had exposed millions to radioactivity, particularly children. Some scientists calculated that the nuclear tests killed 400,000 American children. Government scientists rebutted that the testing killed "only" 4,000 children.

The NCI report on the fallout from Nevada tests was not published until 1997, after it was kept secret for six years. It dealt only with iodine-131 and admitted that tens of thousands of Americans have received cumulative exposure of over 100 rem. (*"Rem" is a measure of the ability of ionizing radiation to cause cancer or genetic defects in children of exposed people. Natural radioactivity is about 0.1 rem/year.*) The highest exposures were to young children who drank milk. It has caused estimated 49,000 cases of thyroid cancer, which however is rarely deadly.

The National Research Council: [Exposure from Nevada Nuclear-Bomb Tests](#)

## DU helmets for our generals?

Our military brains had marched thousands of soldiers through "ground zero" and showered our sailors with nuclear fallout to prove that

radiation is harmless. Their latest craze is ammunition tipped with depleted uranium (DU) for better penetration through steel armor and in turn, reinforcing the armor of tanks with DU.

DU is the radioactive waste left after extracting the isotope U-235 for nuclear weapons or reactors from uranium ore. This reduces the U-235 content only from 0.7 to 0.2 percent, while over 90 percent of the ore is U-238. This makes it 40 percent less radioactive but we now have some 1 million tons of DU.

The Persian Gulf War marked the first battlefield use of armor-piercing DU munitions and DU-reinforced armor. Unfortunately, the generals forgot about "friendly fire" - in several accidents, U.S. tanks fired DU munitions into other U.S. combat vehicles (Bradleys). When a DU projectile hits steel, the high temperature vaporizes the uranium and exposes the survivors to radioactive aerosol and dust.

Wind can carry the DU particles (less than 10 microns) for many miles. Soldiers were exposed to DU inhalation from a fire at Camp Doha in Kuwait, in which DU munitions detonated and burned. Others handled spent DU munitions or entered DU-contaminated vehicles.

About 162 surviving soldiers had radioactive DU fragments embedded in their bodies or inhaled DU particles. Most continue to excrete elevated levels of uranium, exhibit reduced problem-solving performance and have high levels of hormones harmful to reproductive health. Uranium has been found in the semen of some veterans.

Source: [GAO Report on the Health Effects of Depleted Uranium, March 2000](#)

DU exposes soldiers to low-level radiation and also produces radon, which can accumulate inside vehicles or buildings. When soldiers return from a modern, DU-improved war, they cannot be certain for decades whether or not they have really survived.

A single "hot particle" trapped in the lungs subjects the surrounding cells to radiation 800 times the dosage permitted by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for the entire body. The risk is equivalent to getting a chest X-ray each hour for life! Some 80,000 US Gulf War veterans now suffer from the so-called Gulf War syndrome, whose symptoms are identical to radiation sickness.

More recently, U.S. aircraft used DU munitions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro. The cancer deaths of 24 European peacekeepers and illnesses of many others have caused alarm in Europe. Most NATO countries want the ammunition banned.

The military has kept denying that DU has harmful radiological effects

until confronted by Congress. Thus, U.S. troops were not warned that inhalation of uranium dust might cause lung cancer and birth defects in their children until 1999!

But the more devastating effect is on the people we have liberated and the environment. We have dumped 350 tons of DU on Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia and some 1 million bullets still rest in the desert. There has been an increase in lung, kidney and liver cancer, birth defects and still births. Much of Kosovo's ground water has been contaminated and a cleanup would cost billions of dollars. (NYT 1/6/01)

Apart from its mutant effects on flora and fauna, there is the reality that it remains radioactive for 24,000 years. It was recently discovered that the DU fragments quickly disintegrate into a fine powder like cigarette ash. (NYT 9/2/02) Wind then blows this radioactive dust around for people and animals to inhale, contaminating the soil and water in a large area. The military has pledged to Puerto Rico not to use DU munitions on Vieques, but has recently admitted some mistakes.

The Geneva Conventions prohibit weapons which cause indiscriminate harm to non-combatants and weapons which cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the environment. Will the U.S. taxpayers have to pay to clean up after its military in foreign countries?

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