

Fact Sheet

Radon

What is the Radon?

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas released in rock, soil, and water from the natural decay of uranium. While levels in outdoor air pose a relatively low threat to human health, radon can accumulate to dangerous levels inside buildings. Radon cannot always be smelled or tasted, but an elevated radon level in the home may be affecting the health of the family residing there.

Exposure to radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and the number one cause among non-smokers. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that radon causes more than 20,000 lung cancer deaths in the country each year. Only smoking causes more lung cancer deaths. If a person smokes and their home has radon, the risk of lung cancer can be higher.

Where is Radon Found?



Radon has been found in elevated levels in homes in every state. No area of the country is free from risk. Two homes right next to each other can have vastly different radon levels. Just because a neighbor's house does not have an elevated level of radon does not mean that another house within that same neighborhood will have a low radon level. The only way to know if a home is under the EPA action level of 4 pCi/L is to test.

High levels of radon in homes usually come from the surrounding soil. Radon gas enters through cracks and openings—such as sump pump lids and plumbing features—on the lower levels of your home. Hot spots include basements, first-floor rooms, and garages, but radon can be found anywhere in a house.

Test Your Homes Radon Level

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that all homes in the U.S. be tested for radon. Testing a house for radon is easy to do. If a house has a radon problem, steps can be taken to fix it.

A person can find out if a home has an elevated radon level by conducting a simple test. It's as easy as opening a package, placing a radon detector in a designated area, and, after a set number of days, sending the detector back to a lab for analysis. The lab will then inform them of the radon test results.

Radon test kits are available at the St. Clair County Health Department and at home improvement or hardware stores. Another option is to hire a qualified tester to do a radon test. Contact the states radon office about obtaining a list of qualified testers. Information about testing a home for radon and finding a test kit is also available by calling 1-800-SOS-RADON.

Radon is measured in picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L), a measurement of radioactivity. EPA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that homes with radon levels at 4 pCi/L or higher should be fixed. EPA also recommends that Americans consider fixing their homes for radon levels between 2 pCi/L and 4 pCi/L. Based on a national residential radon survey completed in 1991, the average indoor radon level is about 1.3 pCi/L in the United States. The average outdoor level is about 0.4 pCi/L.

The Surgeon General has warned that Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States.

Fix a Radon Problem

The cost of making repairs to reduce the radon level depends on several factors, including how the home was built. Most homes can be fixed for about the same cost as other common home repairs, like painting or having a new hot water heater installed. Look in the local phone book or call the state's radon office to locate radon mitigators in the area if there are elevated radon levels in the home.

Radon-resistant construction methods can be effective in reducing radon entry. When used properly, these simple and cost-effective techniques can help reduce the accumulation of radon gas in homes.

Every new home should be tested after occupancy, even if it was built using radon-resistant construction methods. If radon levels above EPA's action level at or above 4 pCi/L are detected, it is easier and less expensive to reduce radon levels in homes that have been built with radon-resistant construction techniques.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY www.michigan/deq

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY www.epa.gov