



Make radon testing one of your New Year's Resolutions

When Sally Molnar, director of Morrison Cancer Center, moved to Hastings, it was important for her to know that the home she purchased was free of high levels of radon gas. Over the years, Sally has worked closely with many cancer patients. "I want to go home at night knowing that the air I am breathing will not increase my risk of lung cancer", she said.

Sally purchased a home that had pipes in place, but no fan had been installed to evacuate the radon gas. She asked for her home to be tested and the result was high. "People really need to insist that it be tested. No matter what house you are buying, whether it is old or new", she said. Sally proceeded to complete the radon system in order to assure that her home was free of high levels of radon gas.

Exposure to radon gas is the leading cause of lung cancer for people who have never smoked. Cancer caused by radon would usually occur many years (5-25) after exposure.

According to the Nebraska Cancer Registry, 4,486 Nebraskans died of lung cancer in the 5-year period of 2010-2014. Not all of these individuals were smokers or exposed to second hand smoke. Some of these deaths may be attributed to elevated radon levels.

The EPA estimates that radon causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States.

The American Cancer Society describes radon as "a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas." Radon forms naturally from the decay (breaking down) of radioactive elements, such as uranium, in the ground.

Radon gas can be present in closed spaces, like basements. It enters buildings and homes from the soil beneath through cracks and holes in the foundation. Unless you test for radon in your home, there is no way to know how much radon exists in the air you are breathing.

Radon is a health risk for Nebraska. According to Jessica Warner, health surveillance coordinator for SHDHD, approximately 70% of radon test results in the SHDHD service area in 2016-17 had radon levels above the EPA 'action level' of 4 picocuries/liter (pCi/L).

The highest South Heartland result reported in 2016 was 32, and in 2017, the highest was 19.6 pCi/L. The highest reported test result for the South Heartland district was 63.4 pCi/L in 2011.

So, how can you find out if you have a radon problem your home? Short term tests are the most popular way to obtain initial results. Close all doors and windows, and turn off fans that bring in outside air. The kit should be placed at the lowest living level of your home in a room that is frequently used although not a kitchen or bathroom. Place it on a surface at least 20 inches above the floor and away from drafts, away from areas with high heat or humidity, and away from exterior walls. Follow instructions on the kit to determine how many days to leave it in place; short term kits can require from 2-90 days.

Are you planning on buying or selling your home? Requesting testing during a real estate transaction will allow buyers to know if the home they are interested in purchasing has elevated radon. Although not required by law, the home seller can test for radon before putting the house on the market to ensure that it has safe levels to attract potential buyers. The buyer can request a radon test during the home inspection period. If high levels of radon are present, mitigating it can be handled during the home sale similar to other required home repairs.

Beginning in January, during Radon Action Month, South Heartland District Health Department will be distributing short term test kits for \$7.00 at 606 N. Minnesota in Hastings and from SHDHD satellite office sites in Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster Counties. Kits will also be available at the UNL County Extension offices in Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties.

So, if you haven't already tested, make it your New Year's resolution to test your home for radon in January during Radon Action month.

For links to more information on radon, radon testing, local radon test results and radon reduction methods, please visit the South Heartland District Health Department website at www.southheartlandhealth.org or call: 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.

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