



### **Radon is a Serious Health Hazard in South Central Nebraska**

When Adams County resident Susan Kotas and her family moved from Hastings to Juniata, they wanted to “make sure everyone was safe” in their newly built home. The Kotas family tested their Hastings home for radon prior to building a new home in Juniata and found them both to have elevated levels of radon.

“We wanted to make sure we had the safest air environment both for ourselves, but mainly for our kids and we also looked at it as an investment...and it also gave us some peace of mind, knowing that the people that purchased it (our house) had a house that was already mitigated”, said Susan.

You may be wondering if your home has elevated radon gas. Jim Morgan, SHDHD’s public health risk coordinator and certified radon testing specialist would like the public to know that Radon gas can be present throughout your house, but is usually at a higher concentration 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.

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.

Check out these facts about radon:

- 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.
- The EPA estimates that radon causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States.
- According to the Nebraska Cancer Registry, 6,257 Nebraskans died of lung cancer in the 5-year period of 2011-2015. Not all of these individuals were smokers or exposed to second hand smoke. Some of these deaths may be attributed to elevated radon levels.
- Radon is a health risk for Nebraska: 72.3% of radon test results in the SHDHD service area in 2017-18 had radon levels at or above the EPA ‘action level’ of 4 picocuries/liter (pCi/L).
- The highest test result last year for South Heartland health district (Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, Webster counties) was 23.5 pCi/L. The highest level ever reported 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. Kits will also be available at the UNL County Extension offices in Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties and the public library in Superior.

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](http://www.southheartlandhealth.org) or call: 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595.

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