

Testing for Radon is important task

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January is National Radon Action Month, sponsored by the EPA, and also Kansas Radon Action Month. This is the perfect time to test your home for this odorless, colorless and tasteless gas that causes nearly 100 times more deaths each year than carbon monoxide poisoning. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking, and some 21,000 people will die this year due to breathing too much radon without even knowing it.

Radon exposure is the leading cause of lung cancer for nonsmokers. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment estimates that residential radon exposure in Kansas causes around 200 new cases of lung cancer annually in Kansas. Radon is like a spark. It zaps the tissue in the lungs, which causes mutations and can lead to cancer. A 15- year exposure to radon doubles a person's risk of developing lung cancer.

Radon gas exposure is a problem many Miami County residents might not realize they have.

The gas seeps through cracks or openings in a home's basement or crawlspace in an average of one in four Kansas homes, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Radon is an invisible radioactive gas that seeps into homes undetected through foundation cracks and can reach harmful levels if trapped indoors. It travels up from underground sources of uranium in the earth's crust. Radon gas drifts into a building as a natural byproduct of uranium depletion in rocks and soil.

The Kansas Radon Program data base shows that 2010 radon levels in Miami County and adjoining counties is above the maximum average recommended indoor radon concentration of 4 pCi/l. This is the level at which the EPA recommends taking action. Many homeowners in Miami County have done a good job of testing their homes over the last five years, but more homes still need to be tested. The test is one of the simplest ways to detect radon in the home. Test results will tell whether a home is at or above the EPA's recommended reduction level for radon.

The radon threat is preventable with some simple steps. In existing homes, a high level might be lowered simply with a straight-forward radon venting system installed by a contractor. In new homes, builders can easily and economically include radon-resistant features during construction, and home buyers should ask for these. EPA also recommends that home buyers ask their builder to test for radon gas before they move in.

Kansas currently has two statutes related to radon in effect statewide. The first was effective July 1, 2009, and it required the insertion of a specific paragraph related to radon into all statewide residential real estate contracts that "strongly suggests that home buyers have homes they are considering purchasing tested for radon gas as part of their home inspection process." The second statute was effective July 1, 2011, and requires all individuals or companies in Kansas that provide professional radon services be certified by KDHE.

Testing for Radon is important task (cont'd)

Homeowners are allowed to test their own property and mitigate their own homes if desired.

If you would like to test your home, we keep a supply of the test kits at the Extension office. Test kits generally sell for \$5.50 each. Come by the Extension office at 104 S. Brayman St., Paola, to pick up a test kit.

Information regarding how to use these test kits and several fact sheets can be found at the Kansas Radon Program website:

<http://www.kansasradonprogram.org/>

This site is an excellent source for all Kansans to learn more about radon and to access the materials available on the subject. A list of certified radon testers and mitigators can be found here also.

Another good source is <http://www.radon.com>. At this site you can get animated instructions on how to use the test kits. Click on the "Test Kit Animated Instructions" link on the right and then "Click to view some Animated Instructions." This will give you step by step guidelines on how to use the test kit to check your home for radon gas.

If you need further information on this program, please call Diane Burnett, (913) 294-4306, or email dburnett@ksu.edu.