

Radioactive gas is persistent health risk in Minnesota

Written by Minnesota Department of Health
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Every 25 minutes, one person in the U.S. dies from radon-related lung cancer. It is the largest environmental cancer risk and the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Fortunately, the risk is largely preventable.

More than 40 percent of Minnesota homes have dangerous levels of radon gas and state health officials say every home should be tested. To emphasize the importance of radon testing, Gov. Mark Dayton has declared January "Radon Action Month" in Minnesota. Over 40 local public health agencies around the state have partnered with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to make over 8000 radon test kits available to local residents at low or no cost. For details on how to obtain a kit, contact your local public health agency or MDH. A list of participating health agencies can be found on the MDH website at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/radon/rncontacts.html>

During the months of January and February, MDH is sponsoring a series of eye-catching ads in the skyway systems of St. Paul, Minneapolis, Duluth and Rochester designed to get people's attention about radon. MDH will also be sponsoring radio ads in the Twin Cities to encourage people to test their homes.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and more than 21,000 deaths are attributed to radon each year. Radon exposure, however, is a preventable health threat. Over 1,000 Minnesota homeowners every year have radon reduction systems installed in their homes, but this is a small percentage of all Minnesota homes that have elevated radon levels.

Radon is odorless, colorless and tasteless, so the only way for homeowners to know if their home has radon is to test. Testing is easy, inexpensive and only takes 3-5 days. Most test kits are priced under \$20 and are available at city and county health departments, many hardware stores, or directly from radon testing laboratories. Discounted test kits can also be purchased online at www.radon.com.

The best time to test is in the winter, but testing can be done year-round. It is especially important to test during real-estate transactions. Radon tests can be easily incorporated into a home inspection.

Tests should be done in the lowest level of the home that is frequently occupied. Tests should not be done in laundry or utility rooms, kitchens or bathrooms. Once you have tested, further action can be taken based upon your results. If your home's level is over 4 pCi/L, you should consider verification testing and having a radon mitigation system installed. Anyone interested in mitigating his or her home for radon should consult MDH's list of certified radon mitigation contractors at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/radon/mitigation.html>.

For more information on radon testing and mitigation visit www.health.state.mn.us/radon or call the Minnesota Department of Health Indoor Air Unit at 651-201-4601 or 1-800-798-9050. To see how radon has affected the lives of cancer patients and their families visit www.CanSar.org

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