

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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May 12, 2006

Radon is a gas you cannot see, smell or taste yet it can harm you. It is a gas that is found throughout the state of Iowa and in many homes. It comes from the decay of radium and is found in varying amounts in Iowa soils. It is considered the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers in the United States.

Radon does not cause headaches, nausea or other similar symptoms yet prolonged exposure to high levels of radon can lead to lung cancer which is the only known adverse effect. I am writing about radon today because people call our office and ask how to test for it. Also, on a personal note, my wife and I decided to test our home since we finished the basement and are spending more time there with our children. Our initial test showed the radon level in our basement is higher than the action guideline. With two young children this is important information since children are at a higher risk to elevated radon levels because their lungs are still developing and the sensitive tissue is more easily damaged.

Radon moves into homes through openings such as cracks, loose-fitting pipes, sumps, exposed dirt floors, slab joints or porous block walls into the basement or lowest level. The only way to know if you have it is to test for it. There are two types of test kits available; a short term kit that is left in place for two to seven days and is useful as a quick screen to determine if further testing is warranted. The second option is the long term detector which is left in place three months to a year and is generally placed in the main living area of the house. This gives the long term average level of radon which can vary at different times of the year. You can get radon test kits from the Grundy County Sanitarian at 319-824-1212 (\$5 for the short term test and \$19 for the long term test).

The results will tell you how much radon was present at the time of the test. The level is dependent on where the detector was placed, the time of year, the operation of fans and the weather tightness of the home. Levels are usually highest when the home is closed up and the detector is placed in the basement or near possible radon entry points. Readings for an entire year are usually lower than those taken in a basement during the winter.

Radon gas is measured in "picocuries per liter" which is a scientific measure of radioactivity. The EPA has set 4 picocuries (pCi/L) as an action guideline. If the annual average radon level exceeds this number, the EPA suggests that action be taken to reduce the number. Surveys conducted by Iowa State University Extension and the EPA have found that about 70% of Iowa homes have radon screenings above 4 pCi/L.

Reducing high levels of radon will usually require the services of a trained professional in radon mitigation. Radon mitigators in the state of Iowa are required by law to meet requirements set by the Iowa Department of Public Health. For more information on radon, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension and ask for publication Pm 1336.