

**INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**  
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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. 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. In fact, it is considered the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers in the United States.

A few years ago, my wife and I tested our home and found the radon level in our basement was higher than the action guideline. With young children, this was important information to have since children are at a higher risk for health problems related to elevated radon levels. Their lungs are still developing and the sensitive tissue is more easily damaged. The questions we receive in the office have to do with how to test for it and what do we do if the level is high.

Radon enters homes through openings such as cracks, loose-fitting pipes, sumps, exposed dirt floors, slab joints or porous block walls and moves into the homes 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 three to seven days and is useful as a quick screen and a long term detector which is left in place three months to a year and is generally placed in the main living area of the home. 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.

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 (IDPH). You can find them at: <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/eh/common/pdf/radon/mit.pdf>. For more information, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.