

Radon Facts:



*Radon is a radioactive gas that is colorless and odorless. It originates in the soil from the natural decay of uranium that exists in or below most soils.

The only way to know if your home has a radon problem is to test for it.

*Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States.

*The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that radon causes approximately 21,000 deaths per year nationally, most of these are preventable.

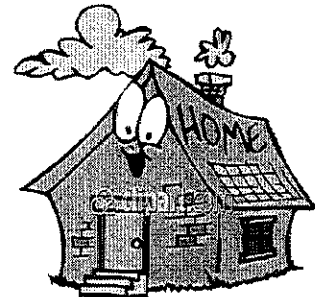
*The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has set a recommended radon action level of 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L). They recommend that all Iowa homes be tested for radon and fixed if over 4 pCi/L.

*Iowa has the highest percentage of homes above 4 pCi/l (picocuries per liter)

Even radon levels below 4 pCi/L pose some risk, and in many cases can be reduced.

*Radon test kits are available from some retail stores, your local Health Department, or from the Iowa AIR Coalition.

To get a radon kit from Iowa AIR Coalition
1-800-206-7818



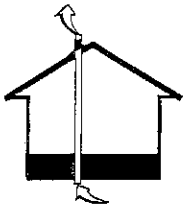
Recommendations:

1. Test for radon. Each house can have different levels of radon and should be individually tested. (*test at least twice if 1st test is high*)

(Kits are available from many local Health Departments or from the Iowa AIR Coalition.)

2. Fix home if levels are high - **4 pCi/l or more** – (list of certified testing and mitigation contractors available from the Iowa Department of Public Health

(1-800-383-5992) *Average cost is \$800-2,000.*



Note: A single short-term test should not be used as a basis to mitigate your home, radon levels may fluctuate over the short term time period.

The average of at least 2 **short-term** radon tests, or one long-term test, or a professional continuous monitor test should be used to determine if the house needs to be fixed or not.

For more information, contact:

- Iowa AIR Coalition of Public Health Officials (at Linn County Public Health)
1-800-206-7818 or (319) 892-6055.
- Iowa Department of Public Health, 1-800-383-5992.

Radon a problem in nearly two-thirds of Iowa homes

By Rick Welke*

When something is wrong with your home, you usually know it. A door won't shut tightly or you may feel a draft that wasn't there before. Something may even drip on your head.

But how do you know if your home contains dangerous levels of a gas that is completely imperceptible by sight, smell or taste? How do you know if you live in one of the estimated 71 percent of Iowa homes that has a radon problem?

The answer is simple and usually inexpensive. Have your home tested.

"The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) strongly recommends that all homes in Iowa be tested for radon," said Environmental Health Division Director Tom Newton. "January is radon action month, so we are challenging all Iowans to test their homes to protect the health of their families."

How dangerous is radon?

Radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers, according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates. In Iowa, over 200 of the 1,700 lung cancer deaths each year are caused by radon. Your family's risk of developing lung cancer from radon depends on the average annual level of radon in your home and the amount of time you spend there. The longer your exposure, the greater the risk.

Although the radioactive gas is found nearly everywhere, radon levels in Iowa are particularly high. It is in the soil due to the decay of uranium and radium that was ground-up and left behind by glaciers. It seeps into your home

from the surrounding soil, regardless of your home's age or type of construction.

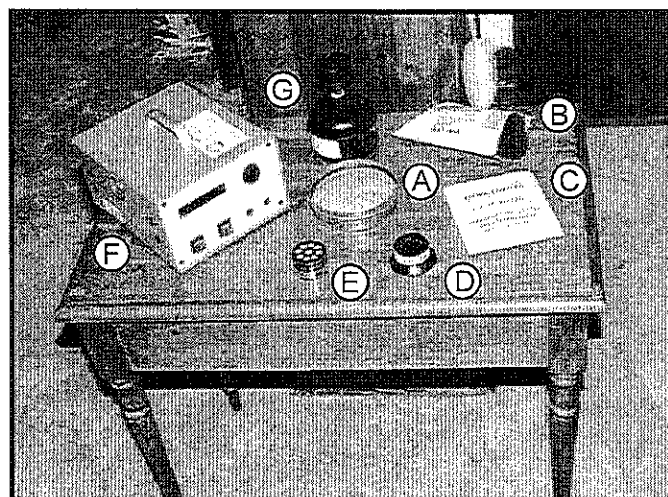
Studies performed in Iowa and elsewhere have convincingly demonstrated an increased lung cancer risk from prolonged radon exposure at or below the EPA's action level of 4 pCi/L (picoCuries per Liter). Iowa has the highest percentage of homes in the United States with radon levels that exceed 4 pCi/L.

"Radon is one of the major environmental hazards we face in the United States," cautions Dr. William Field from the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa. "Deaths attributed to radon and its decay products surpass even the number of deaths each year from other dreaded diseases like brain cancer, melanoma, and bone cancer."

What can you do?

Luckily, radon is easy and inexpensive to detect. However, it's up to you to find out whether radon is a problem in your home. Do-it-yourself kits are available for \$20 or less. The best time to conduct tests is during the cold weather months, like January, when windows are closed.

If you are planning to buy a new or existing home, make sure to have the home tested by a certified radon measurement specialist as part of the

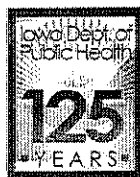


The most common short-term testing devices on the market (A, B and C) use charcoal and are available for as little as \$5. Alpha-track detectors (D and E) are used for longer periods of time and cost about \$20. Other devices (F & G) produce immediate results and are used by professionals (F and G).

purchase agreement. If a short-term test shows a radon level of 4 pCi/L or greater, require a radon venting system to be installed (for \$1,200-\$1,600) before proceeding with the sale. If you have purchased a new home within the last year and your radon level is 4 pCi/L or higher, find out if the home-builder is responsible for paying to lower the radon level.

For information on licensed radon mitigation specialists, call 1-800-383-5992 or visit www.idph.state.ia.us/eh/radon.asp. To find out more about radon and lung cancer health studies performed in Iowa, go to www.cheec.uiowa.edu/misc/radon.html.

* Rick Welke is the Iowa Radon Program coordinator at IDPH.



Iowa Department of Public Health

Advancing Health Through the Generations