Radon

What You Need to Know

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What is radon?

Radon is a radioactive gas you cannot see, smell, or taste. Radon is formed by the natural radioactive decay of uranium in rock, soil, and water. It can move through soil and into outdoor air, or it can seep into homes and buildings through cracks in floors and walls, or gaps around service pipes. In outdoor air, radon gas is diluted to harmless levels. When trapped in an enclosed space like a home or building, radon gas can collect and can be harmful to human health.

What are the health effects of radon?

Radiation from radon can cause damage to cells that can lead to lung cancer. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers, and the second leading cause of lung cancer overall. Your chances of getting lung cancer from radon depend on how much radon is in your home, the amount of time you spend in your home and whether you smoke or have ever smoked. Groups of people at higher risk from long-term radon exposure include:

- Smokers that live in a home with high radon levels
- People that are exposed to secondhand smoke and live in a home with high radon levels
- Children, because their lungs are still developing

What are the symptoms of radon exposure?

Unlike other indoor pollutants, radon exposure does not cause headaches, nausea, sneezing, rashes, or any other symptoms.

How do I know if there is radon in my home?

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA) estimates 1 out of 15 homes in the US have elevated radon levels. Testing your home is the only way to know if you and your family are at risk from radon since there are no warning symptoms and no physical signs to let you know you are being exposed. Radon testing is inexpensive and easy. Various low-cost, do-it-yourself kits are available. You can also hire a trained contractor to do the testing for you. The US-EPA and Surgeon General recommend testing for radon in all homes below the third floor. If a short-term test (90 days or less) is used, testing should be done during winter months when doors and windows are tightly closed. The highest radon levels are usually found in basements and crawl spaces. Radon testing prior to basement remodeling is highly recommended, especially if new living areas (family room, playroom, bedroom) are planned for the space.

How can I lower the radon levels in my home?

Lowering high radon levels requires special knowledge and skills. A qualified contractor can study the radon problem in your home and help you pick the right treatment method. You should test your home for radon again once repairs are complete and every two years thereafter. Two national organizations, the National Radon

Proficiency Program (NRPP) and the National Radon Safety Board (NRSB), offer voluntary certification for radon mitigators and testers.

How can I get information about radon test results and how to reduce radon levels in my home?

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) – Radon Program provides a toll-free radon hotline (1-800-RADON GAS/1-800-723-6642). You can get information on radon health risks, testing, how to interpret results, and how to reduce elevated radon levels. Literature is free of charge, and program staff can help locate do-it-yourself test kits, professional testers, and radon reduction contractors. The MEGLE Radon Program is funded by a grant from the US-EPA and matching funds from state dollars.