

News Release

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High radon levels here for good; Test your home to be safe

Knox County continues to rank 2nd in Ohio for high radon levels and probably always will due to the geological makeup of the county's soil. So, the best thing to do is test your home to make sure you and your family are not at risk.

"Most people don't take radon seriously because its effects are not felt immediately, as with carbon monoxide or natural gas," said Kyle Shackle, a licensed radon tester with the Knox County Health Department. "Fortunately or unfortunately, radon takes a while to cause harm, but when it does, it can be deadly."

Radon is a natural radioactive gas that gets into your home through cracks or openings in the foundation. If large amounts of radon accumulate in the air in your house for long periods of time, it can cause lung cancer. For tobacco smokers, the risk from longtime exposure triples the chance of cancer.

"Now through March is a good time to test for radon, when windows and doors are closed tight to keep out the cold winter air," said Shackle. To help detect if there is a harmful level of radon in your home, the health department promotes the use of free radon test kits for individual testing by homeowners, homebuyers, landlords and tenants. "In-home testing is the only way to test for radon," said Shackle.

Radon can get into any type of building including homes, offices and schools, but you are most likely to get your greatest exposure at home because you spend most of your time there (including the six to eight hours you spend sleeping). Radon usually does not present a health risk outdoors because it is diluted in the open air. However, it can build up to dangerous levels inside a house.

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Sometimes the air pressure between the inside of a building and the soil around it also play an important role in radon entry. If the air pressure of a house is greater than the soil beneath it, radon will remain outside. However, if the air pressure of a house is lower than the surrounding soil (which is usually the case), the house will act as a vacuum, pulling the radon gas inside. The most vulnerable areas are basements and first-floor living areas.

Knox County residents can order a free radon test kit by going to the health department website, www.knoxhealth.com. Click on the Your Community tab, then the Environmental button and finally the Radon page. At the top of the page there is a link to order the free test kit. The link is for Knox County residents only. For those who don't have internet access, you can contact Shackle at the health department, who can order a test kit for you. Contact Shackle at 392-2200, ext. 2227 or kshackle@knoxhealth.com

Detailed, but simple instructions accompany each test kit. The actual testing takes from 3-7 days. The test kit is then mailed to a laboratory for processing. There is no charge for the processing and the kit comes in a postage-paid package. Test results are available in 1-2 weeks.

Testing by the Ohio Department of Health has indicated some levels of concern for area residents. Test levels as high as 500 picocuries (pCi) per liter air have been found in Knox County homes. A level of 4 pCi or above is considered unsafe according to the EPA.

“If a reading is greater than 10 pCi in the initial short term test, we recommend a second test to properly evaluate the extent of the problem,” said Shackle. “In most cases the control measures can be minor such as improving air circulation, sealing of cracks in basement floors and walls and venting of sumps. However, in some cases, a licensed radon mitigator may have to be hired to install a radon mitigation system to lower the elevated levels.”

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