

Test your home for radon this winter

By Manhattan Bach

You can't see it, smell it or taste it, but exposure to radon gas is estimated to cause thousands of deaths each year. For example, Joe, a nonsmoker, died six weeks after being diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. A radon test a month after his death revealed he had been living for 18 years with high levels of radon. The radon in his home measured more than four times the level at which action is needed to mitigate the health risk. He didn't know.

Exposure to radon is the No. 1 cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. If you smoke and your home has high radon levels, your risk of lung cancer is especially high.

Radon is a radioactive gas that comes from the natural breakdown of uranium found in soil. It typically moves up through the ground and can enter your home through cracks and other holes in the foundation. It can then get trapped inside and build up in your home. Any home can have a radon problem – new or old, with or without basements, sealed or drafty. In Montana, 48% of homes tested for radon have levels that are considered hazardous.

No level of radon exposure is considered completely safe. The best way to protect yourself and your family from radon is to test for it. Winter months are the best time of year to test because radon levels are highest when doors and windows are closed. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends reducing radon in your home if tests show 4 picocuries per liter or higher.

Testing is easy and only takes a few minutes of your time. Here's how:

1. Get a test kit. To request a free test kit go to <https://states.aelabs.com/#/mt> or call 800-546-0483.
2. Place the test kit in the lowest lived-in level of your home and wait two to three days. Check the instructions on the test kit for placing the kit and wait time.
3. Follow test kit instructions to send it in for results. If your radon level is four or higher, take a follow-up test.
4. If your second test result is 4 or higher, take action to lower the level.

In some cases, simply sealing cracks in the basement floor and foundation will reduce radon levels. In other cases, you may need to increase ventilation using pipes and fans.

The EPA recommends using a state or nationally certified contractor because reducing high radon levels often requires technical expertise and special skills. The average cost for a contractor to lower radon levels in a home is around \$1,200, although the cost can range from \$500 to about \$2,500. Test again after the work is finished and then every two years.

For more information, check out the EPA's Citizens Guide to Radon at epa.gov/radon.

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