

## January is Radon Action Month

Radon is a radioactive gas. It is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. Unless you test for it, there is no way of telling how much is present. Radon is formed by the natural radioactive decay of uranium in rock, soil, and water. It can be found in all 50 states. Once produced, radon moves through the ground to the air above. Some remains below the surface and dissolves in water that collects and flows under the ground's surface.

The Surgeon General has warned that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. Radon gas decays into radioactive particles that can get trapped in your lungs when you breathe. As they break down further, these particles release small bursts of energy. This can damage lung tissue and lead to lung cancer over the course of your lifetime. Not everyone exposed to elevated levels of radon will develop lung cancer, and the amount of time between exposure and the onset of the disease may be many years.

Nearly one out of every 15 homes has a radon level the EPA considers to be elevated. Because most people spend as much as 90 percent of their time indoors, indoor exposure to radon is an important concern. Most indoor radon comes into the building from the soil or rock beneath it. Radon and other gases rise through the soil and get trapped under the building. The trapped gases build up pressure. Air pressure inside homes is usually lower than the pressure in the soil. Therefore, the higher pressure under the building forces gases through floors and walls and into the building. Most of the gas moves through cracks and other openings. Once inside, the radon can become trapped and concentrated.

Openings which commonly allow easy flow of the gases in include the following:

- Cracks in floors and walls
- Gaps in suspended floors
- Openings around sump pumps and drains
- Cavities in walls
- Joints in construction materials
- Gaps around utility penetrations (pipes and wires)
- Crawl spaces that open directly into the building

The National Safety Council's Radon Hotline provides a toll-free number, (800) 767-7236. Through this automated number, callers can order a brochure on radon. It contains information on ordering a low-cost short-term test kit.

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January 20, 2009

