

Is Radon a Real Problem?

Radon is a radioactive gas that occurs naturally in soil - originating from the natural decay of uranium that is found in nearly all soils. It typically moves up through the ground and into your home through cracks and other holes in the foundation, gaps around service pipes or in suspended floors. Radon then becomes trapped inside your home, where levels of the gas can build up. Any home may have a radon problem: new or old, well-sealed or drafty, with or without basements.

Exposure to elevated indoor radon levels increases the risk of developing lung cancer at some point in your life. Radon exposure in your home is the second leading cause of lung cancer death for non-smokers. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment estimates that as many as 200 new cases of radon-related lung cancer occur each year in Kansas.

The amount of radon in the air is measured in “picocuries per liter of air”, or pCi/L. The average indoor radon level in the United States is estimated to be about 1.3 pCi/L. In Kansas, however, the numbers are much higher. “One in four homes in Kansas will test at or above the EPA’s radon action level of 4.0 picocuries of radon per liter of indoor air,” reports Bruce Snead, director of the Kansas Radon Program at Kansas State University.

January is National Radon Action Month. This is an excellent time for us to learn more about radon and how it affects the communities in which we live.

More than 161,000 homes in Kansas have been tested for radon. Results of these tests show the average radon level across the state is 4.6 pCi/L. When reviewing information specific to both Miami and Linn Counties, the average level of radon in homes measures is much greater. The average radon level in Linn County is 5.9 pCi/L, with Miami County showing an average of 6.4 pCi/L. When the indoor levels of radon reach 4.0 pCi/L or greater the EPA recommends taking action.

Your testing process should begin with a short-term test of two to seven days. If your results are greater than 4.0 pCi/L, follow up with either a second short-term test or a long-term test. Long-term tests give a better understanding of average radon levels. Short-term tests get results quickly. If either the average result of the two short-term tests or the result of a long-term test is over 4 pCi/L, you should consider taking steps to reduce radon levels in your home.

Radon reduction systems work and they are not too costly. Some systems can reduce radon levels in your home by up to 99%. Even very high levels can be reduced to acceptable levels. To find a certified radon mitigation technician, visit kansasradonprogram.org.

The Marais des Cygnes Extension District can help you determine the level of radon in your home through a simple test using a charcoal radon sampler. The sampler is exposed to your home for 48 hours and then mailed to a lab. Test kits are available for purchase at our offices for a cost of \$7.00. Instructions are included with the kit and results from the lab are usually made available in 3-5 days after the receipt of your test kit. These results can be emailed to you, or sent in the mail. Homeowners are encouraged to test their homes every two years.

For more information about radon and testing your home, visit our website at www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu. To purchase your radon test kit, visit our Paola office (104 S. Brayman) or our Mound City office (115 S. 6th Street). If you need further information about this program, contact Kathy Goul at 913-294-4306 or by email at kgoul@ksu.edu.