

News release for 12/27/21

By Barbara Stockebrand
Southwind Extension District –Yates Center
Family and Consumer Sciences

Radon the Silent Killer

We hear about the dangers of radon, known as the ‘silent killer’, but what is it really? Radon is a naturally occurring odorless, colorless, and tasteless radioactive gas created by the decay of uranium in the earth’s crust and is present everywhere on the planet.

Radon gas can make its way into any type of building. However, it’s estimated that one in four Kansas homes have elevated levels of radon. It enters a building from the soil through cracks in concrete floors and walls, floor drains, sump pits, etc. If the concentration of radon is high, your family may be at risk.

Governor Laura Kelly, has designated January, 2022, as “Kansas Radon Action Month” (KRAM). Radon levels outdoors are relatively low, due to dilution with the outdoor air. Our enclosed homes, where we spend more time during the winter months, can lead to higher concentration levels. With many working remotely from their homes, due to Covid, there is cause for more concern around home radon concentrations.

Radon is the number one cause of lung cancer death for non-smokers. Only smoking causes more lung cancer deaths. If you are exposed to smoke and your home has high radon levels, your risk of lung cancer is much higher.

Testing for radon is fairly simple, and winter is an excellent time for Kansas residents to test their homes. Short-term, do-it-yourself test kits are relatively inexpensive and can reveal the amount of radon in any building.

All Kansans are encouraged to test their home and address any elevated radon levels. About one out of every three radon measurements performed in Kansas are elevated, being above 4 pCi/l (picoCuries per liter). Those with high levels can usually be fixed with simple and affordable venting techniques.

Radon kits can be purchased for \$7.50 per kit by contacting your county Extension Office. The cost includes the return shipping by USPS to the laboratory and the cost of the device analysis.

Some areas have higher levels than others, though elevated levels of radon have been detected in every county in the state. As many as one in 15 homes across the U.S. has elevated radon levels that often go undetected.

Experts state that just because the house across the street or two doors down doesn’t have elevated radon levels, doesn’t mean all housing in the neighborhood is safe. There isn’t a clear way to tell where the radioactive gas will move through the rock formations below ground.

Homeowners should talk with a certified radon contractor if levels above 4 pCi/l are detected. A list of certified radon contractors is available by calling the Kansas Radon Hotline at 800-693-KDHE (800-693-5343).

Additional information about radon can be obtained at www.kansasradonprogram.org or by contacting the Yates Center Southwind District Extension Office at 620-625-8620.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.