

Radon: A Silent Killer Can Lurk in Homes, MU Expert Says Test Now

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It can't be seen, felt or tasted and it is even odorless. That is why radon is called the silent killer. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer deaths in the United States. A University of Missouri-Columbia expert says testing is quick and inexpensive and well worth the time and effort.

Radon is a radioactive gas that can seep into homes from the surrounding soil and can even contaminate well water, according to the EPA. The risk of developing lung cancer from radon depends on the radon level in a home and how much time is spent there.

"There is no myth behind it, you can't see it, you can't smell it, but it is there and it can make you sick," said Michael Goldschmidt, MU Extension housing and environmental design specialist. "People who smoke in the home are twice as likely to get cancer from radon."

Special detection kits are necessary to uncover a radon problem in a home. Short-term testing is the fastest way to determine if there is a potential problem, while long-term testing is the most accurate. Short-term kits can be purchased at hardware stores and be checked for results within 48 hours and give a good indication of the approximate radon level in a home.

"If you buy a home test kit from a store and the reading is low, you are okay; if it is high, it is time to have your home tested by a professional testing company," Goldschmidt said.

There are simple solutions to reduce the radon level in homes. The average cost of installing a system to vent radon from a home is \$1,200. According to the EPA, radon does not affect only a certain type of home. Home construction can affect radon levels; however, radon can be a problem in old homes, new homes, drafty homes, insulated homes and homes with or without basements. Local geology, construction materials and how the home was built are among the factors that can affect radon levels in homes.

“If there are a lot of cracks in the foundation, in the basement wall, basement slab, or if a home is a one story home on a concrete slab with cracks, there is a concern and there is more chance of radon becoming airborne and getting into the lungs of the occupants of the house,” said Goldschmidt, who also is an assistant professor of architectural studies in the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

Radon naturally occurs in the soil and air around the soil. If people have neighbors with elevated levels of radon, that is an indicator that people around them need to test as well.

Source: University of Missouri

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