Addressing Radon in our Homes and Schools

Radon exposure can damage lung tissues. Indoor radon is the leading cause of environmental lung cancer in Iowa.

Radon gas is released when uranium breaks down. Uranium is a natural chemical found in Iowa’s soils and rocks. Outdoor levels of radon are low. However, radon levels can build up inside a building. Radon is an odorless, tasteless, and colorless gas. The only way you know if you have high levels of radon is to test for it.

71.6% of Iowa homes are above the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommended action level. Iowa has the largest percentage of homes in the United States that above the EPA threshold for taking action to remediate radon levels.

In 2005, Richard H. Carmona, the U.S. Surgeon General, recommended that homeowners test their homes every two years. For high levels of radon, homeowners should install a radon mitigation system, which involves installing a vent pipe and a fan. The mitigation work costs about $800 to $2,500 according to the American Lung Association.

**Testing for radon in schools makes sense**

Given the high levels of radon found within the state, it only makes sense to have a program of testing schools for radon levels and then initiating methods to reduce radon levels if they are high. Furthermore, it makes sense to repeat the tests every two years, just to make sure that radon levels remain safe.

In 2019, the Legislative Services Agency, the research arm of the Iowa legislature, estimated that a radon test would cost $15. EPA recommends testing each frequently-used ground-level room.

**Building radon abatement systems in new homes also makes sense**

Likewise, it is beneficial to all homebuyers to be aware of the radon levels in a home at the time the home is sold. It is sensible to require new homes to have radon abatement systems already built in. The abatement system involves installing a vent pipe and a fan.

**Sources**

“HF755 – Radon Testing”, Fiscal Note, Legislative Services Agency, April 1, 2019


Iowa Department of Public Health, http://idph.iowa.gov/radon/resources


“Radon & You: What you need to know to protect you and your family”, American Lung Association in Iowa