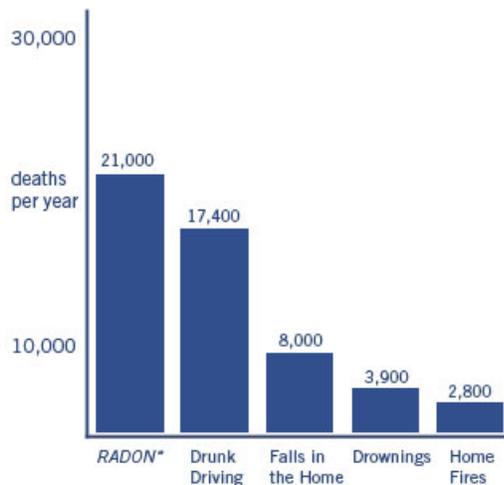


January is National Radon Action Month. Many public agencies, including K-State Research and Extension, put extra effort this month toward informing the public of the health concerns surrounding extended exposure to radon gas.

Why is exposure to radon gas a concern for us? According to the Environmental Protection Agency, radon is estimated to cause about 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year, according to EPA's 2003 Assessment of Risks from Radon in Homes (EPA 402-R-03-003).

This deadly gas cannot be seen and contains no odor. It is a naturally occurring colorless radioactive gas that seeps into our homes, schools, and businesses through the soil. It becomes a health hazard when it builds up to higher concentrations in the buildings in which we live and/or work. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer overall and is the first leading cause of lung cancer in people who have never smoked.



Graphic Source: <http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/citguide.html>

EPA estimates that indoor radon contributes to 21,000 lung cancer deaths in the U.S. each year. Exposure causes no immediate symptoms, and often goes unrecognized until serious health complications arise. In Kansas, more than 200 lung cancer deaths per year may be linked to indoor radon.

The more you know about radon gas, the better decisions you can make about avoiding or reducing exposure to the fumes. One in three tests taken in Kansas has radon gas levels that are above the recommended level. It is important to test your home's radon

gas level. The level of radon in the air is measured in "picocuries per liter of air," or "pCi/L." A safe level of radon is considered to be anything below 4.0 pCi/L.

The average national indoor radon level is 1.3 pCi/L. Compare that to the average indoor radon levels in Geary county and surrounding Kansas counties:

Area Counties	Average Radon Level (pCi/L)
Geary	5.3
Dickinson	5.6
Clay	7.2
Riley	5.6
Morris	3.3
Wabaunsee	5.5

Data Source: <http://county-radon.info/KS> - as determined by radon test results from Air Chek, Inc.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) recommends that every household in Kansas be tested. If the home tests above 4.0 pCi/L, action needs to be taken to fix the problem. Even new homes can be susceptible to concentration of radon gas. Kansas residents building new homes can incorporate Radon Resistant New Construction building techniques into the home to protect the family from exposure to unhealthy level of radon. However, the EPA recommends that **every** new home should be tested after occupancy even if these techniques were used during construction.

Homes that have already been built need to be tested for radon. If the test results are higher than the recommended maximum, the homeowner can hire a radon mitigation technician to make the necessary repairs and add an approved system that will reduce radon to a safer level. Although there is no known level that is considered completely safe, reducing the level has proven to be successful in minimizing the number people effected by radon gas.

Before you contact a technician though, you can use a radon test in your home to determine if you need radon mitigation. Once you know the radon level in your home, you can determine what services you need to hire for. Even if you took a radon test several years ago, it is a good idea to check the level every 2 years. If you have changed your living patterns or remodeled a lower level of your home to use for more living space, it is important to take a radon test. The tests are simple to use and take little time to complete.

To help you find someone in your area that provides radon mitigation services, KDHE provides a list of state certified Radon Measurement and Mitigation Technicians. You

can access this list on the Kansas Radon website at:

<http://www.kdheks.gov/radiation/radon.htm>

If you are looking to purchase a home, you should ask the realtor or previous owner for the results and date of the most recent test. If a test has not been done in the last two years, request that a test be done before you agree to sign the contract. The Environmental Protection Agency provides several helpful documents for homeowners and those looking to buy a home on their website:

<http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/citguide.html>. Especially helpful to those who are in the market to purchase a home or are planning to move is the EPA pamphlet titled "Home Buyer's and Seller's Guide to Radon."

Radon testing kits are available at a nominal cost in the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office, 119 E. 9th Street, Junction City, Kansas. For more information about radon, radon testing, and radon contact us at 785-238-4161. If you have questions about other indoor air hazards, ask us for publication MF2787. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!