Protect your family from radon, test your home

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

STANTON — The old saying, "What you don't know can't hurt you," certainly doesn't apply when it comes to the presence of radon in your home.

According to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), radon invades nearly one in eight Michigan homes. Could yours be the one?

This naturally occurring radioactive gas is found in almost any kind of soil or rock. It travels through the ground to the air above, and into your home through cracks and other holes in the foundation, floor or walls. Any home — old or new — may have a radon problem.

Radon has no warning signs; it can't be seen, smelled or tasted, and contrary to what some might think, it does not cause headache, nausea, or fatigue.

What it can cause, however, is lung cancer. The Surgeon General has warned that breathing air containing radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States today. Only smoking causes more lung cancer deaths. If you smoke and your home has high radon levels, your risk of lung cancer is especially high.

"There is only one way to know for sure if your home has an unsafe level of radon," said Bob Gouin, environmental health division director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), "and that is to test, and now is the ideal time."

Winter is the best time to test for radon because doors and windows are typically kept shut so the radon level isn't diluted by the introduction of fresh air. It is recommended that every residence be tested for radon by taking a short-term test first.

Short-term test kits may be obtained at MMDHD for free and take only a few minutes to administer. If the result is four picocuries per liter of air (4 pCi/l) or higher, you should follow up with a long-term test to measure the year-round average. Long-term kits may be purchased at most hardware stores and are also available at MMDHD for $25.

If unsafe radon levels are found in your home, it is very important that you take immediate action using a trained and certified radon mitigation (reduction) contractor who will guarantee results below 4 pCi/l.

To obtain a radon test kit, or request a list of local certified radon remediation contractors, contact the MMDHD in Stanton at (989) 831-3607.

For additional information, visit MMDHDs website at www.mmdhd.org, or the DEQ's website at www.michigan.gov/deq.

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