

What is radon?

Radon is a natural radioactive gas formed by the decay of uranium in the earth's soil. It is tasteless, odorless and invisible.

Eventually it works its way to the surface through cracks and porous soil. Diluted into the outdoor atmosphere the gas poses little danger because of the high ratio of air to radon.

What is the health risk of radon?

Radon seeps through gaps in the foundation or insulation and is trapped in the confined area of a home. Long-term exposure to radon under these conditions has been associated with an increased risk of lung cancer. The EPA estimates that radon is responsible for 7,000 to 30,000 deaths annually.

How is radon detected?

Because radon gas is odorless, tasteless and invisible, scientific equipment is needed for detection. There are two basic methods for measurement--a short term device and an alpha-track detector.

A short term device can be placed in the home for two to seven days. It is then returned to the manufacturer for analysis.

An alpha-track detector can be placed in the home from three months to one year before being returned to a laboratory for examination. Results are returned to the homeowners.

There are other techniques--requiring operation by trained personnel--which can be used to measure radon levels, but these techniques may be costly.

What is the difference between long-term and short-term monitoring?

Radon gas levels can vary from day-to-day and even week-to-week. Many different factors can cause this variance including changes in weather, opening and closing of doors, the type of air conditioning/heating systems being used and lifestyles of the family.

A short-term monitoring period may detect an unrepresentative peak or valley of radon concentration causing a false sense of alarm or a false sense of security.

Longer-term testing averages your exposure to radon levels over a period of time. Experts agree that this gives a much more conclusive test result.

What steps can I take to reduce the high levels of radon in my home?

Corrective actions can often be quick and inexpensive. In some cases, the following steps will help to lower dangerous levels of radon gas or prevent it from entering your home:

1. Ventilate your home. Open windows or doors (natural ventilation) or use ventilation systems (forced ventilation), i.e. fans, air exchange ventilators, etc. to increase air flow whenever possible.
2. Make sure all crawl space vents are open and clear.
3. Seal cracks in foundation, along basement walls, floors or moldings.
4. Seal loose-fitting pipes.
5. Vent sump pumps.
6. Paint basement floor and walls.
7. Install sub-slab ventilation.