

What You Should Know About Radon

by Lisa Turner

Did you know that radon causes more deaths every year (cancer) than drunk driving? If you don't know what radon is, you need to find out now. This is a fast and informative article on radon facts and how you can lower your cancer risk.

Knowing about radon is more important than ever before, as new facts emerge about its deadly consequences. The United States Surgeon General re-emphasized to the nation in January of 2010 the fact that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking in the U.S. If you smoke AND the radon levels in your home are high, you will have a very high risk for lung cancer. What can you do? Plenty! And it's easy.

First, what is radon? Radon comes from the natural radioactive breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water, and ends up in the air we breathe. Radon is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. Although radon is found in all types of buildings, we get most of our exposure when we're at home. Radon can exist in the air, and in our water source. Although radon levels vary throughout the United States, radon has been found in every state. You can see the average levels of radon by pulling up the maps on the internet at www.epa.gov/radon.

What levels of radon are ok? Radon in the air is measured in "picocuries per liter of air", or "pCi/L". Generally speaking, levels less than 4 pCi/L are considered safe, although if you can reduce the levels further it's a good idea. The really good news in all of this is that you can TEST for radon, and you can put systems in the home to lower radon levels. The systems for lowering the levels are relatively inexpensive. If you have a reading of just over 4pCi/L, you may be able to do some simple sealing of leaks around the crawlspace or basement of your home to lower the levels in the home itself.

How should I get my home tested? Who should install a mitigation system if I need one? Good news here too. Testing your home is easy. The first way is to do it yourself by going to a home improvement store and buying a test kit. Follow the directions carefully to ensure the most accurate results. The second way to test your home is to call a professional radon tester. These individuals are trained and certified to administer and interpret the test and can advise you on what to do if your levels are high. The cost to get a professional to test your home is low - usually \$125-\$200. They will come to your home and leave several test canisters open to the air. They will give you specific instructions for the 2 days the canisters are active. They will then return and send the canister media to a certified, registered laboratory that will have the analysis within one or two days. You can contact your state radon office for a list of professionals who have registered with them, or you can call a local home inspector who routinely performs radon testing as part of the home sale. If you discover through testing that you need a radon reduction system, you should ask your professional tester for referrals or check with the state radon office (www.epa.gov/radon). The person or company you choose should be a qualified, licensed contractor, preferably certified in radon mitigation, and you should get more than one estimate.

The last piece of good news is if you do need to reduce the levels of radon in your home, it is not expensive to do. A vent and fan system is usually the first line of defense, and will lower the radon to acceptable levels over 85% of the time. NOTE: If you do your own test and the reading comes out over 4pCi/L, I recommend that you call a professional for another test of your home to confirm your own reading.

There is a lot more that you can learn about radon by going to the Environmental Protection Agency's web site (www.epa.gov) and by going to www.radon.com. Get a copy of the free [A Citizen's Guide to Radon](#) from the EPA site or from our company site: www.YourInspectionExpert.com.

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About the author: Lisa Turner is the owner of Your Inspection Expert, Inc. (www.YourInspectionExpert.com) in Hayesville, NC, specializing in home inspections and radon testing for home buyers, home sellers, and homeowners wanting to maintain their homes in peak condition. Lisa can be reached at 800-738-8781 if you have any questions about radon in your home or home inspections.

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