



Frequently asked questions about Radon

**From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency
Division of Environmental Health**

What is radon/where does it come from? Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is tasteless, odorless, and colorless. It comes from the radioactive decay (breakdown) of uranium, which is found in almost any kind of soil or rock. Granite, shale, and certain other types of rock have higher than average amounts of uranium, and as a result, may produce higher concentrations of radon.

What radon level is safe? There is no “safe” radon level. There is believed to be some risk to be associated with any exposure, and as a general rule, the higher the radon level and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk.

The guideline for an acceptable level of radon indoors is 4 pCi/l. This guideline was selected because the rule of thumb is to keep exposure to radiation as low as reasonably achievable, and 4pCi/l is a reasonably achievable radon level.

What is a picocurie? A picocurie is a unit of measure for radiation. A curie is the way of measuring radioactive decay or disintegration

Is radon really a health risk? (I’ve heard it is a scam!) Yes, radon is a Class A carcinogen, which means it is known to cause cancer in humans. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer after tobacco smoke, resulting in approximately 14,000 lung cancer deaths in the United States each year. Not everyone who breathes radon will develop lung cancer. Your risk is determined by such things as how much radon is in your home (and/or workplace, school, or other indoor environment); the amount of time you spend in your home (and/or workplace, school, or other indoor environment); and whether you smoke or ever have smoked. The longer you are exposed, and the higher the radon level, the greater the risk.

How do I know if I have a radon problem in my home? Since radon gas is odorless and colorless, the only way to know whether your home has elevated radon levels is to test *your* home. And since radon levels can vary from home to home, you can’t use your neighbor’s test results to determine whether or not your home has a problem.

How does radon get into my home? Radon enters homes through openings in the foundation floor or walls, wherever the foundation is in contact with the soil. Because it’s a gas, radon can travel through the soil. Tiny or large openings in the foundation floor or walls can act as entry points.

My home is new, so I don't have to worry, right? Actually, any home, regardless of age, energy-efficiency, or foundation type, could have a radon problem. The only way to know whether or not a particular home has a problem is to test THAT home.

Where can I get a radon test kit/Who can test my home? Radon test kits can be purchased through the mail, on the Internet, at local hardware stores or other retail outlets, or from your local health department. Most short-term do-it-yourself radon test kits cost between \$10 and \$20, and long-term kits generally cost between \$20 and \$50. Be sure to read and follow the package instructions

If I find a radon problem, what next? (Can it be fixed? Who does this kind of work? What does it cost? What do they *do* to fix a radon problem?)

When a problem has been confirmed, you may want to hire a professional radon mitigation contractor to help you reduce the levels. (Radon mitigation contractors are not licensed in Michigan, but you are encouraged to use an individual who is certified by the National Environmental Health Association. Occasionally, when the radon levels are fairly close to the guideline of 4 pCi/l, caulking and sealing radon entry points may be enough to bring the radon down to acceptable levels. However, caulking and sealing does not always provide the reduction you need, and it is seldom a long-term solution to a real radon problem. The cost of a radon mitigation system in Michigan can vary significantly depending on where you are in the state and who you hire. A typical range in price would be \$800-\$1,600.

I'm buying a new home and the inspector found radon. What do I do now? (Should I walk away from the deal?) Radon levels can almost always be reduced, so if you like a home, you should buy it. (Radon is not a good reason to walk away from the deal.) The issue is negotiable between the buyer and the seller, and there are a lot of options to consider

Could radon be a problem in my kids' school or where I work? Yes, radon could be a problem in your children's school or in your workplace. Radon does not distinguish between the foundation of a home, school, office, or other building, and if there is a source, driving force, and entry point(s), radon can enter any building. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends that schools and workplaces be tested to determine whether radon is a problem.

For more information about radon or other health department information, visit us on the web at:

www.bhsj.org

Or call your local Health Department office at:

Coldwater
279-9561 x 106

Hillsdale
437-7395 x 111

St. Joseph County
269-273-2161 x233