

# THE RADON PROBLEM

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## **THE RADON PROBLEM**

You can't see radon. And you can't smell or taste it, but it may very well be a problem in your home. It is estimated to cause many thousands of deaths each year. Radon is a cancer-causing, radioactive gas, and when you breathe air containing the gas, you can get lung cancer. In fact, radon has now been declared 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.

Radon can be found all over the United States. It comes from the natural breakdown of uranium in soil, rock and water and gets in to the air you breathe. Radon can get into any type of building, homes, offices, and schools and build up to high levels. But you and your family are most likely to get your greatest exposure in your home because that is where you spend most of your time.

Testing is the only way to know if you and your family are at risk from radon. The Environmental Protection Agency along with the Surgeon General recommend testing all homes below the third floor for radon. It is inexpensive and easy to do the testing and it only takes a few minutes of your time. Millions of Americans have already had their homes tested. Radon from soil gas is the main cause of radon problems although it can also enter the home through well water. And in a small number of homes, certain kinds of building materials may give off the gas, too. However, the building materials rarely cause the problem by themselves.

It has now been determined that nearly 1 out of every 15 homes in the U.S. is estimated to have elevated radon levels. Elevated levels of radon gas have been found in every state including homes in your state.

The public has only recently started showing interest in this deadly, cancer-causing gas. Contact your state radon office for general information about radon in your area. While radon problems may be more common in some areas, any home may have a problem. Home buyers and renters are now asking about radon levels before they buy or rent a home.

While radon in water is not a problem in homes served by most public water supplies, it has been found in some well water. If you've tested the air in your home and found a radon problem, and your water comes from a well, contact a lab certified to measure radiation in water to have your water tested. If you're on a public water supply and are concerned that radon may be entering your home through the water, call your public water works.

Since there is no known safe level of radon, there can always be some risk. But the risk can be reduced by lowering the radon level in your home. A variety of methods may be used to reduce radon in one's home. In some cases, sealing cracks in floors and walls may help to reduce radon. In other cases, simple systems using pipes and fans may be used to reduce the gas. Because major renovations can change the level of radon in any home, always test again after you have any work done. There are reliable test kits available through the mail, in hardware stores and certain other retail outlets.

Like other environmental pollutants, there is some uncertainty about the magnitude of radon health risks. However, more is known about the risks of radon than from most other cancer-causing substances. This is because estimates of radon risks are based on studies of cancer in humans such as underground miners.