



## Our View — Testing the best tactic to tackle radon

The Free Press

— Lung cancer isn't just for smokers anymore.

Radon is the cause of an estimated 20,000 cancer deaths a year, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates. As education about the dangers of radon increases, more people are taking measures to find out whether they are at risk. So many people responded to a recent Free Press article about the importance of testing their homes and buildings for radon that the Minnesota State University Radon Project has temporarily run out of test kits. (More kits have been ordered and will arrive in a few weeks. Most county health departments also have test kits.)

Part of the concern has to do with the fact high levels of radon are common here because the Upper Midwest has a lot of uranium in its soil. Radon is a product of the breakdown of uranium, which is radioactive. The federal standard is 4 pico curies of radon per liter of air. The MSU Radon Project reports measurements of up to 46 pico curies per liter in the Mankato area.

The tough thing about figuring out whether radon presents a threat in your home is that the gas is colorless, odorless, tasteless and unpredictable. Just because your neighbor's house doesn't have high readings of radon doesn't mean your house won't. The project's test results show that of 422 tests in Mankato, 281 showed results above the acceptable level. That's 66 percent. (Take into account that buildings may be tested repeatedly.)

Although tests that show high radon levels are a concern, at least homeowners can do something about it. Mitigation, which should be done by qualified contractors, may include a number of measures, including sealing cracks, installing a venting system, membrane sheeting in crawl spaces, house/room pressurization or an air-to-air heat exchanger. Costs of the various measures range from about \$800 to \$2,500. A new law going into effect this year mandates new houses built in Minnesota must have a radon-mitigation system built in.

Dealing with radon may be a hassle and an extra expense, but it's not an insurmountable kind of problem for most homeowners. And if it means avoiding lung cancer, then the payoff is obvious.

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