

Radon maps available—January is National Radon Action Month

Testing in the state continues to indicate that Nebraska has a high prevalence of radon gas in homes. Of over 70,000 tests conducted since 1990, 57 percent have been above acceptable health levels, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

The EPA-set health standard for radon is 4 picocuries per liter of air, although even exposure to lower levels may raise a person's risk. The average level of picocuries in homes and other buildings across the state is 5.9 picocuries.

"The data supports what we've known for some time," said Sara Morgan, Indoor Air Quality Program Manager. "Nebraska homes are very likely to have high levels of radon."

Radon is a colorless, odorless, naturally occurring gas that originates in the soil and builds to dangerous levels in homes. Since it is radioactive, it is very damaging to lung tissue when people breathe it in. EPA estimates that approximately 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year are due to radon exposure.

"Lung cancer is usually a fatal illness. People should reduce their risk as much as possible, and radon testing is the first step," said Dr. Joann Schaefer, chief medical officer.

On the Nebraska Radon Program website, new maps show radon averages across the state, as well as separate county maps which show radon averages at the zip code level.

"The maps are not a predictor of what radon level an individual home will have," Morgan said. "Even counties with low averages have some homes with high radon levels. Likewise, some

high average counties have homes with low radon levels. Your neighbor's radon level is not an indication of what your radon level will be, so each homeowner needs to test."

Tables are also available online which show data such as the highest radon level tested, the number of tests conducted, and the number of homes by county or zip code.

The Nebraska Radon Program can provide homeowners with a low-cost radon test kit, interpret the test results and explain the mitigation system.

To purchase a short-term radon test kit for \$5, send a check or money order with name and mailing address to: Nebraska Radon Program, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68509.

To see the new summary data and maps showing areas in the state with high radon levels, visit <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/radon/>.