What's on the Horizon for Public Health

Radon - A Minnesota Health Threat

Radon is a colorless and odorless gas that comes from the soil. The gas can accumulate in the air we breathe. Radon gas decays into fine particles that are radioactive. When inhaled these fine particles can damage our lungs. Exposure to radon over a long period of time can lead to lung cancer.

It is estimated that 21,000 people die each year in the United States from lung cancer due to radon exposure. A radon test is the only way to know how much radon is in your home. Radon can be reduced with a mitigation system.

Radon is produced from the natural decay of uranium and radium, found in rocks and soil. Uranium breaks down to radium, and radium eventually decays into the gas radon. Radon gas is in the soil and common throughout Minnesota. Because soil is porous, radon moves up from the soil and into the home. It can then accumulate in the air and become a health concern.

Radon is a serious public health concern in Minnesota. The average radon level in Minnesota is more than three times higher than the average U.S. radon level. This is due to our geology and how our homes are operated. Minnesota homes are closed up or heated most of the year, which can result in higher levels of radon. In Minnesota, more than two in five homes have radon levels that pose a significant health risk.

Both short and long term radon test kits are available at Horizon Public Health offices. Short term radon test kits provide a quick, one week, measurement to determine if a radon level is present in the home. The short term test is usually a good first step. The long term kit provides a more accurate measurement of radon levels in the home and takes 90 days to complete.

Call Horizon Public Health at 320-208-6670 for more information.

(Information provided by Minnesota Department of Health and Brandon Klein, Horizon Public Health Environmental Health Specialist)

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