

For Immediate Release

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North Central District Health Department

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Radon in Nebraska

Radon is an invisible, odorless, tasteless radioactive gas. It comes from the decay of radium and is present in varying amounts in most soils. Since radon is a gas, it is able to move through the soil and into the air or even into homes. In the outdoor air, radon becomes relatively harmless as it is diluted. However, once radon is trapped inside an enclosed space, radon can accumulate. The concentration of radon inside homes is dependent upon the amount of radon in the soil, the number of available paths into the building and the strength of the force drawing the radon into the building. Levels vary greatly from community to community, street to street and from home to home.

Radon decays into a solid, radioactive decay product. These decay products can attach to other particles in the air and be inhaled. The inhaled radon products stay in the lungs and release tissue-damaging radiation. Radon **does not** cause headaches, nausea, sneezing and other symptoms normally caused by indoor air pollutants. Radon's **only known health effect** is lung cancer after prolonged exposure to high levels. Radon is considered to be the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. Children are at a higher risk from long-term exposure because their lungs are still developing and the tissues are damaged more easily. Persons who smoke are also at a higher risk, approximately 15 times greater than a nonsmoker.

The existence of radon in the air has been known for a long time, but it's presence in homes was not realized until 1984. High indoor radon levels have been noted in almost every county in the United States. In Nebraska, over 50% of homes test above the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) "action level". Many Nebraska homes are considered "slightly high" and very few have been in the "very high" category. Radon enters the home as it moves through the soil into basements or lowest levels of homes through cracks, loose pipe fittings, sump pits, dirt floors, slab joints, or block walls.

Every home in Nebraska should be tested for radon. Only individual testing can determine which homes may have a radon problem. Testing is very easy and free test kits are available through North Central District Health Department. They can be picked up at our office at 422 East Douglas in O'Neill, at local farm and home shows, your local county extension offices or they can be mailed to you. Please call Jacqueline Wilson for more details 1-877-336-2406.

North Central District Health Department serves Antelope, Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Pierce, and Rock Counties.