

Residents are Encouraged to Test for Radon

The Connecticut Public Health Department has proclaimed January as Radon Action Month and urges all Connecticut Residents to test their homes for radon and, if necessary, to mitigate high concentrations.

Radon is a naturally occurring colorless and odorless radioactive gas that is often found in soil and bedrock. Since radon is a gas, it moves easily through rock and soil and into the air. Outdoors radon levels are low, but in an enclosed space like a house, radon can increase to a high level. Radon can enter a home through a dirt cellar floor, cracks in the foundation, joints between a concrete floor and walls, through sump pump drains and other openings. Also, it can be released into the home by running water from showers, faucets and washing machines. The source of the water can be groundwater within a rock formation that contains a high concentration of radon.

Long-term exposure to high levels can increase one's risk of developing lung cancer. Public health officials have determined that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. When exposure to radon is combined with smoking or inhaling secondhand smoke, the risk may increase dramatically.

The only way to know if your home has a high radon level is to test for it. Radon levels tend to be higher during the winter months when homes are closed to the outdoor air and when heating systems that require combustion of fuel are used. The combustion sometimes creates a negative pressure within the basement and results in the infiltration of outside air through the openings previously discussed. The operation of bathroom and kitchen exhaust fans and the use of clothes dryers add to the negative pressure. Testing for radon during January and February is recommended.

The Town of Durham Health Department has several radon test kits that were obtained through a promotion by the Connecticut Department of Public Health Radon Program (www.dph.state.ct.us). If you would like to test your home, please contact Bill Milardo at the Durham Health Department at 349-8253 to obtain a free kit. If a kit is unavailable, you may be able to purchase test kits from the American Lung Association (ALA) which offers radon test kits for \$12. The price includes the sampling device, instructions, laboratory analysis, tax, postage and handling. To purchase a test kit you may call 1-800-LUNG-USA or visit the ALA website at www.alact.org.