



Radon– The Invisible Invader

What is Radon?

Radon is a gas that comes from the natural breakdown of uranium and radium deep within the surface of the earth. These elements can be found everywhere in the world. Geology plays a role in radon distribution depending on the type of parent rock beneath your property. Radon is an inert gas, which means that it does not combine with elements in the soil. Because of this, radon gas can move up through the soil into the atmosphere, where it is easily mixed with the air and presents no health concern. However, when radon enters a building, generally through the

basement, it can build up and become a health concern. Radon gas can get into your house through cracks in floors and walls, gaps in pipes, and cavities inside walls. Radon gas is invisible, odorless, and tasteless, so it cannot be detected without a test.

How can Radon hurt me?

Radon gas is a health concern because it is difficult to detect. Your body can not detect the presence of radon because it is colorless, tasteless and odorless. The primary health problem associated with radon is lung cancer. The risk of lung cancer depends on the concentration of radon and the length of time a

person is exposed to it. In general, risk increases as the level of radon, the length of exposure and an individual's smoking habits increases.

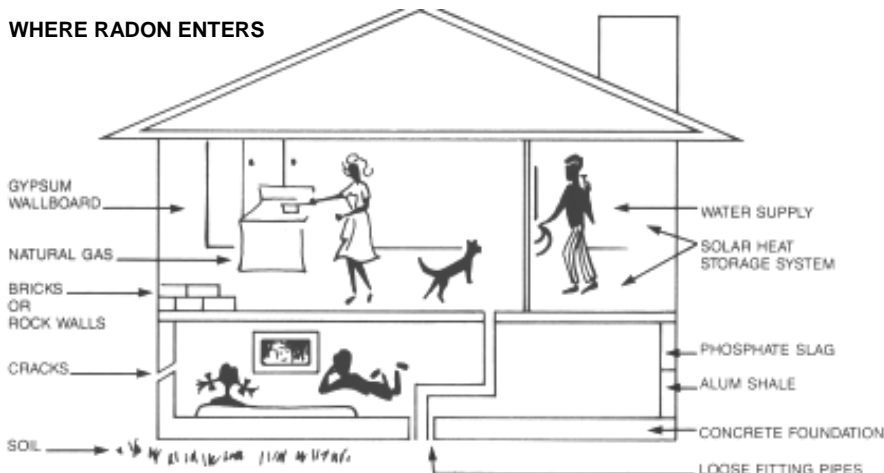
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Not everyone who breathes radon decay products will develop lung cancer, and for those that do, the time between exposure and the appearance of cancer may be many years. Lung cancer generally does not appear until a person is at least 35 years of age.

Who is at risk for exposure to radon?

Radon is present all over the country, including here in Berrien County. It can be in any building, but homes are the most important place to check for radon since that is where we spend most of our time. The only way to know if you have been exposed to radon is to test your home!

WHERE RADON ENTERS



The good news: radon problems can almost always be fixed!

Testing is cheap and easy, and a test can be obtained by calling the Health Department at 927-2960. When buying a new home, be sure to ask if the home has been tested for radon. Also test when you do a major renovation such as finishing your basement.

If tests show that there is radon in your home, you can hire a licensed contractor to repair your home to reduce the risk of radon exposure to your family. The professional will install a vent and fan to reduce pressure under your house and allow the radon gas to go outside. Since the State of Michigan does not certify contractors to perform radon removal, visit one of the following websites to see a list of contractors who are trained to inspect for radon:

<http://www.radongas.org> or <http://www.nrsb.org/>.



Special thanks to Ken Priest, Environmental Health Specialist, for his help with this article!

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor		Niles		Three Oaks	
769 Pipestone	M-139 Office	School Based	1205 N. Front St.	21 N. Elm	
P.O. Box 706	2106 S. M-139	870 Colfax Ave	684-2800	756-2008	
926-7121	927-5623	925-4500			

Or visit us on the web at www.berriencohlthdept.org

Berrien County Health Department:

Preventing Disease, Prolonging Life and Protecting the Health of the

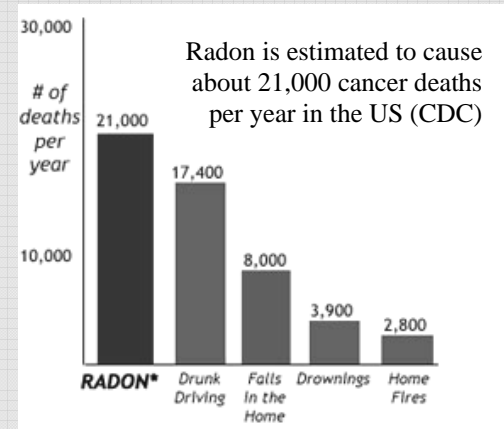


November is Breathe Easy Month

Take a deep breathe! For some this is not as easy as it sounds. This month the health department will bring you information about lung diseases, home breathing hazards, the hazards of smoking and ways to quit, and the Berrien County smoking regulation. For questions about any of these topics, please call the health department at **926-7121**.

Radon Facts

- Berrien County's radon rates are three times the national average.
- Of homes tested for radon in Berrien, nearly 30% had levels higher than what is safe (over 140 homes in Berrien have been verified to have high radon levels).
- Radon is a leading cause of lung cancer, second only to cigarette smoking.
- There are no physical symptoms associated with radon exposure, except developing lung cancer.



If you are concerned about elevated levels of radon in your home, you can contact the Health Department's Environmental Health office. A sanitarian (health inspector) who knows about radon can answer any of your questions. Test kits are available at the BCHD M-139 office for the low cost of \$5.00. For more information call:

927-2960

This page is sponsored by the Berrien County Health Department

