



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A NEWSLETTER BROUGHT
TO YOU BY YOUR TOWNSHIP

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Every Pennsylvania Homeowner Needs to Worry About Radon

January is Radon Action Month, and as a public service, we are urging residents to test their homes for this silent but deadly killer. Winter is the best time to test for radon since homes are closed up and levels are at their peak.

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When it comes to geology, you could say Pennsylvania is blessed and cursed. While rich supplies of coal, shale, and other minerals have helped fuel the commonwealth's economy through the years, high deposits of uranium haven't been as kind.

As uranium decays in soil and rock beneath the Earth's surface, it produces radon, a naturally forming radioactive gas that rises to the surface and mixes harmlessly with outdoor air. However, when it seeps through foundations, spaces, and cracks and becomes trapped inside structures, radon levels can rise and, over time, damage lungs and lead to cancer.

"Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has some of the most severe radon problems in the country," says Robert K. Lewis, radon program manager with the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). "It's in every county north, south, east, and west, although certain areas of the state are more severe."

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, according to the U.S. Environmental Pro-



Radon, a naturally forming radioactive gas, is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Homeowners are urged to get their residences tested.

tection Agency (EPA), and the number-one cause among non-smokers. While the health risks of radon are preventable, making people aware of the

dangers of this colorless, odorless, invisible killer remains a challenge.

DEP estimates that 40 percent of homes in Pennsylvania have an unsafe level of radon.

“Testing your home for radon gas is the only way to know if it’s a risk. The good news is that it’s very easy to do,” Robert Whitcomb Jr. of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

Easy and affordable

According to DEP, radon risk is location-specific, and levels will vary depending on soil composition, atmospheric conditions, and home construction. Therefore, even two, almost identical, side-by-side homes could have different readings.

“It’s not hard for radon to find its way into a structure,” Lewis says. “And the more energy-efficient and tighter you make a house, the more buildup of the gas you get.”

There are two main types of radon tests: short-term ones that take between two and 90 days and long-term tests that take more than 90 days. Homeowners can perform these tests or hire a professional. If you rent your home, ask your landlord to get it tested. Test kits can be purchased for as low as \$14.

If you choose to do the testing yourself, the EPA offers the following advice:

➤ **Start with a short-term test.**

Homeowners should test for radon in the lowest level of their home where people spend time. If you use part of your basement for living space, like a playroom, test there. If you only use your basement for storage, test the first floor. Avoid testing in places that are damp, such as the kitchen, bathroom, or laundry room.

You can buy test kits at home improvement and hardware stores or online. To order a test kit over the phone, call the National Radon Hotline at (800) SOS-RADON (767-7236).

Note: If your home has a radon level of four or higher, it’s time to take action.

➤ **Test your home again if the radon level is four or higher.**

The radon level in your home can change. Therefore, a long-term test is the best way to know what the level is over time. That said, here are a few other things to take into consideration:

- If the radon level was very high or if you are in a hurry, use another short-term test.
- If the level was close to four and you have time, use a long-term test.
- Be sure to test your home again after a remodeling project or if you make changes to your heating, ventilation, or air conditioning systems.

➤ **If your home has a radon level of four or higher after two tests, call a contractor.**

If two radon test kits show that the radon level in your home is four or higher, which is roughly equivalent to smoking half a pack of cigarettes a day, hire a qualified contractor to do the repairs. You may also want to take action if the radon level is between two and four.

DEP recommends that homeowners with high radon levels install a radon-reduction system or add a fan if a passive system is already in place. A complete system can be installed for between \$800 and \$1,200 on average, DEP says.

Because Pennsylvania law requires all professional radon testers, mitigators, and laboratories to be certified by DEP, homeowners should confirm they are dealing with a certified contractor when mitigating radon. To verify certification, call (800) 23-RADON (237-2366) or go to www.dep.pa.gov and search “Radon Services Directory.” (**Note:** When installing radon-control measures during new home construction, a contractor does not have to be DEP-certified.)

Finally, once the radon-reduction system has been installed, be sure to perform a follow-up test to ensure that the problem is resolved and the system is working properly.

“Radon is so house-specific,” DEP’s Robert Lewis says. “The bottom line is find out your risk by testing and, if levels are high, fix the problem.”

DEP estimates that 40 percent of homes in Pennsylvania have an unsafe level of radon, with many counties experiencing even higher percentages.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK IS APRIL 8-12, 2019

Help your community: Volunteer!

As Pennsylvania prepares to **celebrate Local Government Week, April 8-12**, this is a golden opportunity to thank local elected and appointed officials for their service and to ask a critical question: What can I do for my township?

The answer to that question is simple: Lend a hand.

Volunteering not only allows you to give back to your community but also gives you an opportunity to play a role in shaping your hometown. Above all else, though, when you donate your time and talents, you’re helping to reduce costs and keep taxes low.

How much time you give is entirely up to you. You can make a big commitment to the township by serving on the planning commission, the parks and recreation board, or becoming a first responder, or you can perform other tasks, such as helping out with a mailing, planting flowers and trees, installing playground equipment, writing articles for the newsletter, taking photos at a township-sponsored event, or even doing some filing.

To get the volunteer ball rolling, call the township and talk to the staff about your skills and how much time you have to offer. We appreciate your willingness to pitch in and will work with you to find opportunities.