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Health Department encourages home radon testing

Did you know that you could be breathing in radon gas right now? Have you ever tested your home for radon gas? “If you haven’t tested your home for radon, consider adding this to your resolution list,” suggests Michele Bever, executive director for South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD). “It’s a healthy choice that can help reduce your risk of lung cancer.”

The American Cancer Society describes radon as “a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas.” Radon forms naturally from the decay (breaking down) of radioactive elements, such as uranium, in the ground.

“Radon gas can be present in closed spaces, like basements. It enters buildings and homes from the soil beneath through cracks and holes in the foundation,” reports Jim Morgan, SHDHD’s public health risk coordinator and certified radon specialist. “Unless you test for radon in your home, there is no way to know how much radon exists in the air you are breathing.”

Radon is a health risk for Nebraska. According to Jessica Warner, health surveillance coordinator for SHDHD, approximately 70% of radon test results in the SHDHD service area in 2016 had radon levels above the EPA ‘action level’ of 4 picocuries/liter.

“The highest South Heartland result reported in 2016 was 32, however, some homes in the South Heartland district have tested in the very high range of 19.1 – 108.7 picocuries per liter.” said Warner.

Exposure to radon gas is the leading cause of lung cancer for people who have never smoked. Cancer caused by radon would usually occur many years (5-25) after exposure.

“The EPA estimates that radon causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States,” said Dr. Bever. “We are encouraging residents to find out if they are at risk by testing their homes. There are some simple ways to fix most homes, if your radon levels are high,” she said.

In January, during Radon Action Month, SHDHD is promoting radon testing by distributing short term test kits for \$7.00 each at 606 N. Minnesota in Hastings and from SHDHD satellite office sites and county UNL Extension offices in Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster Counties.

“Make it your New Year’s resolution to protect your family by testing to see if you have radon in your home,” said Morgan.

Residents can find out more about radon and radon testing at the South Heartland District Health Department website www.southheartlandhealth.org or by calling 1-877-238-7595.