Living Well and Being Aware of Radon during National Radon Action Month

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January is National Radon Action Month. Radon is a naturally occurring gas that enters structures from the surrounding soil. You can’t see it, smell it, or taste it. Depending on the amount of radon found in your home you may be at risk for health problems. Radon is the second leading cause for lung cancer in the United States, second only to tobacco smoking. Overabundance of radon gas in Florida homes isn’t a huge problem according to all of the statistics but it’s better to be safe than sorry!

Radon is formed from the natural radioactive decay of uranium in rock, soil, and water. Naturally existing, low levels or uranium occur widely in the Earth’s crust. It can be found in all 50 states and once produced moves through the ground to the air above and on to dissolve in water that collects and flows under the earth’s surface. But it isn’t this that makes radon radioactive. Radon undergoes transformation about every four days and when this happens it is then that radioactive particles are released. These particles can get trapped in your lungs when you breathe and continue to break down further and release more radiation. This can damage lung tissue and lead to lung cancer over the course of your lifetime. Not everyone exposed to elevated levels of radon will develop lung cancer, and the amount of time between exposure and the onset of disease may be many years. However, this should not stop you from doing what you can now to ensure that you and your family are not at risk.

In the US, nearly one out of every fifteen homes has a radon level that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers to be elevated and is putting the home’s residents at risk for health problems. This figure does not include the numbers of homes that have levels of radon that are not considered elevated but nonetheless is still present. Most people spend as much as
90 percent of their time indoors, which makes the amount of exposure alarming. The only sure way to determine the level of radon in your home is to test.

A wide range of test kits for radon are available. Radon test kits should cost between $15 and $25, depending on the type of kit. This price should include laboratory analysis which includes a report will be mailed to you after you have sent the kit back to the company for processing. There are two types of test kits for in-home radon testing. Short-term tests offer a quick and inexpensive way to “screen” for radon in your home. Short-term tests do not measure the annual average of radon. They are typically left in place of 2 to 7 days. Be sure to follow the instructions with the test kit for accurate results. Test kits can be found at most larger retail stores and can also be ordered from websites online.

Using a test kit to find out where your home stands may be quite comforting. In a country where there are so many other health problems abreast, it is important to do what we can to reduce the risk to which we expose ourselves. Remember to take action this month and find out just where your home stands with radon. For more information or if you are concerned about the levels of radon in your home see the Florida Department of Health Website http://www.doh.state.fl.us/ or contact the Baker County Extension Office at (904) 259-3520.