

New law should provide valuable information for buyers

Radon test kits available at county Health Department

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

A new law that requires home sellers to disclose whether the house has been tested for radon should provide valuable information for buyers.

The law, which took effect Wednesday, calls for the seller to disclose to a buyer whether they have knowledge of radon in the home. The law does not mandate testing or mitigation; instead, a Minnesota Department of Health radon awareness brochure will be given to the 40,000 annual home buyers across the state at the point of sale.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, and one in three Minnesota homes pose a risk from the odorless, tasteless gas, according to the Minnesota Department of Health.

The so-called “Radon Awareness Act” also requires the seller to hand over records pertaining to radon testing or mitigation of the residence, if available.

The more you know about radon levels in your home the better, said Lindsa Barnhart, Koochiching County health educator.

Prior to the new law, Barnhart said a seller could tell a potential buyer that the home does not have high levels of radon.

“And that could mean I haven’t tested it,” she said. “This law leads to more honesty and transparency in a transaction. They can still sell a home with high

radon levels, but at least the truth is out there.”

While northeast Minnesota does not have the highest radon levels in the state, Barnhart said testing a home is easy with a home test kit available for purchase at the county Health Department.

“I had good results,” she said of the test. “But others have come in to buy the longer-term test because the short-term test showed high levels.”

Home test kits come in two forms: short-term test kits are available for \$5 each and the long-term kits for \$15. The short-term kits, which take from three to seven days, should be used first. If the short-term kit shows radon present, she said the 90-day kit should be used.

Some people, she said, may adhere to the old adage, “ignorance is bliss,”

she said. “But I want people to get the truth and do what needs to be done to keep your family safe,” she said.

In Koochiching County, AirChek Inc., a radon testing company, reports that 30 percent of average indoor radon levels in the county are at the “do something” level, said Barnhart.

“Everyone has to make the decision for themselves, I can only speak personally, that I would want to know if my home had high radon levels,” she said. “I did the test and had a fantastically low level and I have a lot of peace of mind knowing that.”

She said radon tests should be conducted where people spend a significant amount of time, adding that many people spend a lot more time at their work site than at their homes.

Barnhart said that some people believe that their home cannot have radon present because it does not

have a basement. But that’s not necessarily the case, she said, adding she’s not an expert but has done some homework.

“Radon comes up through the ground, whether it’s into a basement or main level of the home,” she said. Home radon test kits should be placed in the lowest level where people spend the most time.

She said she did not test her basement because she only spends time there when doing laundry. However, she said, if a home has bedrooms in the basement, the basement should be tested.

Timing of the tests is important, Barnhart said. High winds may throw off the results of a short-term test and tests should be conducted during the heating season. A long-term test should be conducted during a time that borders the heating and non-heating period to get the best results.

Should someone find high levels of radon in their home they are advised to conduct mitigation through repairs. She said locally, Corrin’s Plumbing and Heating, Up North Builders and Pelland-Swenson and Associates, conduct radon mitigation work.

For more information on radon, call Barnhart at 283-7070 or stop by the Koochiching County Health Department to buy radon test kits.

For other information see:

- A radon brochure from MDH: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/radon/rnbrochure.pdf>
- Radon test guidelines section for more specifics about when/how to test: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/indoorair/radon/radontestresults.html>
- Radon info by county: http://mn-radon.info/MN_counties.html



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