

## **RADON - A SILENT KILLER**

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When we hear the words “lung cancer”, we often think about smoking tobacco; however, you may have something just as dangerous creeping into your home – Radon.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Office of the Surgeon General, Radon causes as many as 20,000 lung cancer deaths each year. Radon is a major cause of lung cancer, second only after cigarette smoking. Lung cancer induced by Radon costs over \$2 billion dollars annually in health care costs. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ranks Radon as a more serious threat than lead paint, PCBs, dioxins and asbestos combined.

Most people don't think much about Radon, and yet Radon can have a major impact on your health and your family's health. That's because Radon can seep into homes and contaminate the air inside without you even being aware!

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas. It results when Uranium breaks down in the soil. The decay of Uranium causes Radon particles to form, and leach into the rocks, soil, and even water. Most of the time, Radon harmlessly dissipates into the atmosphere outdoors, as it has for millions of years, presenting no major problems. It becomes a problem when it finds its way into our homes.

Radon gas collects in voids and air spaces under the foundation of your home and gradually enters through cracks or even through showers and drainage sumps. Once it enters the living areas of your home, the only way out is through cracks and openings. Most new homes have much better insulation than in the past, so the Radon gas becomes trapped indoors.

Reducing radon levels may be as easy as opening crawl space vents or as involved as hiring a radon contractor. Methods may include sealing radon entry routes, ventilation, or removing radon in the soil underneath the home. Before you decide to lower levels, you should complete an initial Radon test. If Radon levels are high in your home, you should conduct a follow-up test to confirm the initial test results.

According to the EPA, one in three homes that were checked in seven states had Radon levels over the recommended safe level of 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L). While there is no safe level for Radon exposure, it is agreed that the risk of death due to Radon at 4 pCi/l is approximately 1 in 100. Exposure to 4 pCi/l in your home is 35 times as much radiation as is allowed by the National Regulatory Commission, if one were standing next to a fenced radioactive waste site.

The first step is to find out what the Radon level is inside your home. Testing is simple and inexpensive. Radon test kits can be purchased on-line at:

[http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/housing/radon/radon\\_test.html](http://www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/housing/radon/radon_test.html) or by stopping in the Oconee

County Extension Office.

*For more information about Radon or other Family and Consumer Science topics, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946, <http://www.ugaextension.com/oconee> or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.*

