January is National Radon Action Month; Take Steps to Ensure Your Home’s Safety

Morgantown, WV – (January 2, 2018)

Did you know that when it comes to radon, Monongalia County is in the red zone? That means that Monongalia County homes have a high potential for elevated levels of radon, a radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that all homes be tested for radon. Monongalia County Health Department’s Environmental Health staff members are nationally board-certified to conduct radon tests. A staff member can visit your home and employ continuous measuring equipment that will detect radon levels. The device is left in place for 48 hours, and then the staff member returns to read the results.

About one in five homes in Monongalia County is found to have radon, said Joe Lawson, of the Environmental Health staff. That is compared to an overall rate of one in 15 homes in the United States, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

“Monongalia County is in a region known to have high radon levels and that is why it is important to get your home tested for radon,” Lawson said. “Long-term exposure to radon gas can lead to lung cancer. It’s estimated in the United States that 21,000 people die per year from exposure to radon gas.”

It is the second-leading cause of lung cancer, after cigarette smoking, and a high level of radon is even more dangerous to people who smoke than to non-smokers.
Radon is a gas that cannot be seen, smelled or tasted. Radon is the result of radioactive metals breaking down in rocks, soil and groundwater. Exposure to radon occurs primarily by inhaling air that comes through cracks and gaps in buildings and homes. Radon comes naturally from the earth, so exposure to small doses of the gas is constant.

Radon can be a factor year-round, but when homes are closed up and not ventilated because of cold winter weather, a high level of radon is even more dangerous.

Owners of homes or businesses that have radon levels of 4.0 pCi/L (picocuries per liter) or higher should install a system to reduce the amount of radon gas in the atmosphere in a process called mitigation, which should be performed by a licensed radon mitigation contractor. “Radon mitigation is roughly about $1,500 per household,” Lawson said.

January is National Radon Action Month. The goal of National Radon Action Month is to increase public awareness of radon, promote radon testing and mitigation and advance the use of radon-resistant new construction practices. An increased public awareness will save lives from radon-induced lung cancer.

For more information about radon or to set up a test, call MCHD Environmental Health at 304-598-5131. You also can find more information and request a test online at monchd.org/environmental.

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