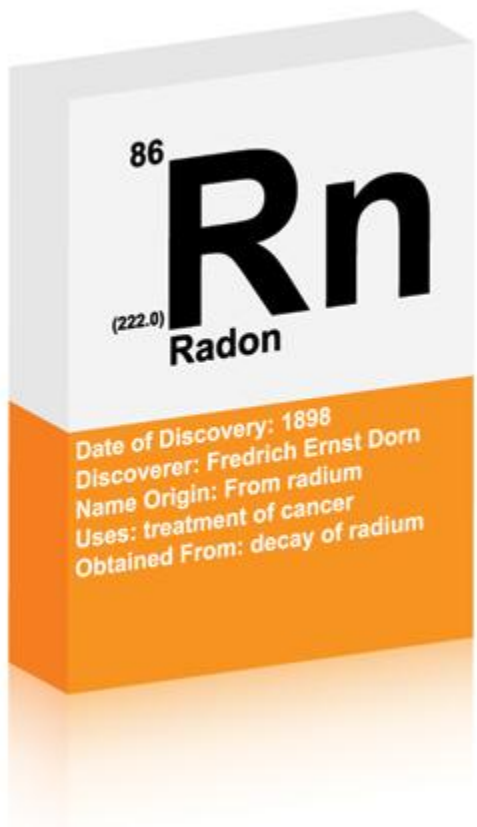




Governor Rauner proclaims January 'Radon Action Month'

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IEMA, ALA launch initiative to help school districts test buildings for radon

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Bruce Rauner has proclaimed January ‘Radon Action Month’ in Illinois to encourage residents to test their homes for radon, a radioactive gas that is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. To kick off the month, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and the American Lung Association in Illinois (ALAIL) today announced a statewide initiative to help Illinois school districts screen school buildings for radon.

It's estimated more than 1,100 people in Illinois develop radon-related lung cancer each year, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes radon as the leading cause of home-related deaths in the U.S.

IEMA, the ALAIL also are joining with Southern Illinois University (SIU) Medicine in January to increase public awareness of radon risks and ways to reduce radon exposure, as well as to enhance understanding of this health hazard within the medical community.

As part of the school initiative, districts throughout Illinois can receive radon detection equipment, assistance with developing a radon testing plan and guidance on radon detector placement within school buildings. To participate in the program, designated school district employees must complete an online training course on procedures for performing screening measurements in their district school buildings.

IEMA and the ALAIL will work with participating school districts on development of a quality assurance project plan and a final report, as well as providing guidance for placement of measurement devices in one school building in each district.

"State law encourages school districts to test buildings for radon every five years," said IEMA Director James K. Joseph. "This program will provide the equipment and guidance schools need so they can conduct the tests themselves and save the cost of professional testing."

The initiative is similar to a pilot program launched in 2011 that assisted 56 schools in 17 districts with testing more than 2,500 rooms for radon. IEMA found 70 percent of the buildings had radon levels above 4 picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L), which is the level at which radon remediation efforts are recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Only eight percent of the total classrooms tested had levels above 4 pCi/L, which would be expected as radon tends to be an issue only in isolated areas of most school buildings.

In many cases, radon levels in schools can be lowered through modifications to the heating and air conditioning systems, while a professional radon mitigation contractor may be needed to address elevated radon levels in other schools.

The ALAIL will deliver radon detectors to participating schools and assist designated school personnel with testing protocol and detector placement. Cost for the detectors and ALAIL's work will be supported by an IEMA grant funded through the federal State Indoor Grant Program.

"Americans spend almost 90 percent of their time indoors," said John De Rosa, Environmental Program Director, ALAIL. "It's important that we are safe at home, at

school and where we work. This program provides a low-cost opportunity to keep both teachers and students safe from the dangers of radon gas.”

School districts interested in participating in the program should contact Kallie Sinkus at Kallie.Sinkus@lung.org or by phone at 217-718-6667. School testing will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis.

IEMA today also recognized Tracey Smith, DNP, of SIU Medicine with the 2016 Illinois Excellence in Radon Award. Smith is the director of Population Health Integration and Population Health Education for SIU Health and the Department of Family and Community Medicine, as well as an assistant professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine. She has worked with IEMA to educate medical school staff and students on the risks of radon exposure. She also supervised the development of the first online continuing medical education course on radon available nationally.

A display on radon risks, testing and mitigation currently is on display in the SIU medical library to educate medical students and medical professionals about the naturally occurring health hazard. In addition, IEMA radon program staff will provide a presentation on radon during a “Lunch and Learn” for SIU employees on Jan. 27 in the medical library.

Addressing the impact radon has on health, Tracey Smith noted, “We are aware that where a person lives affects their health more than what we often do in the health care setting. It has been well-documented that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after tobacco for those who smoke and the leading cause of lung cancer for those who are non-smokers. Therefore, as we provide training to future health care providers on how to provide general preventive messages to patients to reduce the risk of cancer, we must include education on the impact of radon exposure on lung cancer risk.”