

A silent killer: Madison County Health Department offering cheap radon testing kits

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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WOOD RIVER – The Madison County Health Department is warning residents of the county of radon – a silent, odorless, invisible and possibly lethal threat.

January is Radon Awareness Month, and the county is offering test kits for the gas at \$6 a pop. Radon is a known carcinogen, causing the second-highest rate of lung cancer deaths in the county. Only cigarette smoking causes more. Radon as a gas can sneak into homes from sump pits, foundation cracks, gaps in suspended floors, construction joints and exposed soil in crawl spaces. It can also enter homes through water – especially if it comes from a well.

Radon is created in the natural deterioration processes of the earth. It is released during the breakdown of uranium and radium in rock formations.

Testing for radon occurs in the lowest occupied floor of the house and takes three days to process. It should not be done in kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms or utility rooms, the health department warns. The testing measures radioactivity in the air, which is caused by the gas. The radiation is measured in picocuries per liter of air.

According to a release from the Madison County Health Department, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) reports the average household in Illinois has 4.9 picocuries per liter, and the Surgeon General and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommend fixing homes with levels above four. The EPA also suggests fixing homes with levels between two and four picocuries per liter.

“With the presence of radon in this geographic area, we encourage residents to take the advantage of this opportunity and test for radon in their homes,” Madison County Health Department Protection Manager Erin Boester said in the release.

To get the low-priced \$6 testing kits, Madison County residents are invited to purchase a kit at the department, which is located at 101 E. Edwardsville Road in Wood River between 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

If higher-than-acceptable levels of radon are found within the home, residents are able to contact the health department for professional follow-up and mitigation. As many as 20,000 lung cancer deaths are caused by radon each year in the U.S.