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Make radon testing one of your New Year's Resolutions

When Sally Molnar, director of Morrison Cancer Center, moved to Hastings, it was important for her to know that the home she purchased was free of high levels of radon gas. Over the years, Sally has worked closely with many cancer patients. "I want to go home at night knowing that the air I am breathing will not increase my risk of lung cancer," she said.

Sally purchased a home that had pipes in place, but no fan had been installed to evacuate the radon gas. She asked for her home to be tested and the result was high. "People really need to insist that it be tested. No matter what house you are buying, whether it is old or new", she said. Sally proceeded to complete the radon system in order to assure that her home was free of high levels of radon gas.

Exposure to radon gas is the leading cause of lung cancer for people who have never smoked. Cancer caused by radon would usually occur many years (5-25) after exposure.

The American Cancer Society describes radon as "a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas." Radon forms naturally from the decay (breaking down) of radioactive elements, such as uranium, in the ground.

"Radon gas can be present in closed spaces, like basements. It enters buildings and homes from the soil beneath through cracks and holes in the foundation," reports Jim Morgan, SHDHD's public health risk coordinator and certified radon testing specialist. "Unless you test for radon in your home, there is no way to know how much radon exists in the air you are breathing."

Radon is a health risk for Nebraska. According to Jessica Warner, health surveillance coordinator for SHDHD, approximately 70% of radon test results in the SHDHD service area in 2016-17 had radon levels above the EPA 'action level' of 4 picocuries/liter (pCi/L).

"The highest South Heartland result reported in 2016 was 32, and in 2017, the highest was 19.6 pCi/L. The highest reported test result for the South Heartland district was 63.4 pCi/L in 2011.

"The EPA estimates that radon causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States," said Dr. Michele Bever, Health Director at SHDHD. "We are encouraging residents to find out if they are at risk by testing their homes. There are some simple ways to fix most homes, if your radon levels are high," she said.

In January, during Radon Action Month, SHDHD is promoting radon testing by distributing short term test kits for \$7.00 each at 606 N. Minnesota in Hastings and from SHDHD satellite office sites and county UNL Extension offices in Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster Counties.

"Make it your New Year's resolution to protect your family by testing to see if you have radon in your home," said Morgan.

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