

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

SCHOOL RADON TESTING PROGRAM

Fact Sheet for School Staff

WHAT IS RADON?

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is odorless, colorless and tasteless. It comes from the natural decay of uranium that is found in nearly all soils in the United States. Radon gas inside homes and schools can build up to levels that become unhealthy. There is no truly “safe” level of radon since lung cancer can result from very low exposures to radon – however, the risk decreases as the radon concentration decreases.

WHY IS RADON A PROBLEM?

National studies have found that exposure to radon is linked to lung cancer. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, after cigarette smoking, and is the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers. There is no scientific evidence that children are at a higher risk from radon than adults. The risk estimates are based on exposure over a lifetime, and most lung cancer cases occur after age 60. Radon does not appear to be linked to any other diseases, such as asthma.

When considering the risk to children, keep in mind that children spend 12 percent of their time in school and more than 75 percent of their time at home, during the year. It is important to test schools for radon; it is even more important to test your home and mitigate if there are high levels of radon.

HOW WILL SCHOOLS BE TESTED?

For school districts that have elected to test for radon, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires all frequently occupied rooms (such as classrooms and offices) that are in contact with the ground, or are directly above unoccupied areas of the basement, to be tested. Testing must be done by a professional certified by DEP, or by school officials who have received both training and a DEP exemption. Testing consists of placing a test device in each room, exposing it for several days, and then returning it to a laboratory to be measured.

HOW CAN I HELP?

In order for testing to be effective, testers will need the cooperation of staff and students:

1) Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas and it is affected greatly by air currents and air pressure differences. Your cooperation is needed to ensure that outside doors and windows are kept closed (except for normal entry and exit) starting twelve hours prior to the beginning of the test and continuing throughout the testing period. If you encounter difficulties, please contact the principal or the school administrator who is coordinating the test.

2) The heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system should be operating normally through the testing period, with the usual start-up and set-back periods. If you have heating or ventilation controls within your classroom or office, operate them as you would normally (with the exception of opening windows).

3) The test devices must not be disturbed during the test period, which typically lasts two to five days. They will be placed in a location that minimizes the likelihood of disturbance, but please assist in ensuring that they are not moved or handled by students.

In addition, teachers can play a role in educating students about radon in conjunction with the testing period. Lesson plans and general information are available from the DEP Radon Website at www.njradon.org.

For further information, contact:

**New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Radon Section
(800) 648-0394 or (609) 984-5425
www.njradon.org**