

RADON GAS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is radon gas?

Radon is a colourless, odourless, radioactive gas that occurs naturally in the environment. It comes from the natural breakdown of uranium in soils and rocks.

How does radon get into a home?

Radon can enter a home through foundation cracks and similar unsealed openings in basement walls and floors. Radon levels are generally highest in cellars and basements because these areas are nearest to the source and are usually poorly ventilated.

What does it do?

Although you will experience no immediate symptoms, the gas can damage lungs at the DNA level, potentially leading to cancer, when inhaled at high levels over many years.

How serious is the threat?

Radon is the leading source of lung cancer after smoking. It is estimated to kill 2,000 Canadians every year. Because there is some risk at any level, homeowners may want to have their homes tested and take any steps to reduce their exposure to radon, regardless of levels tested.

What are the changes to the radon guidelines?

Health Canada's new guideline was developed in partnership with the provinces and territories. It is now 200 becquerels ("bec-krells") per cubic metre, much reduced from 800 becquerels per cubic metre.

Health Canada's guideline for radon has always been based on the best available scientific evidence of health risk and two recent, independent scientific studies in Europe and North America have shown that the lung cancer risks extend to levels of radon found in some homes.

How do I know if my home is at risk?

The only way to determine the actual concentration of radon in a home is by a direct measurement. Radon test kits are available over the Internet for less than \$50. The tests take three to six months to complete. The best time to test is between September and April, when your windows and doors are closed.

Which is at a higher risk? New or older homes?

Radon can enter any home. However, remediation options available to you may differ, depending on the type of foundation you have. If building a new home, speak to your builder about construction options that may reduce your risk. Every new home should be tested for radon by the homeowner after occupancy.

What if I get an unacceptably high reading?

Radon concentrations in a home can usually be lowered by: reducing the emission from the ground into the building (for example, sealing cracks in cement foundations), and increasing the ventilation in basements and other enclosed areas where radon accumulates.

Is the remediation work costly?

Costs typically range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on the amount and type of work needed. Please note that radon-reduction mediation techniques may also result in energy savings and lower your utility bills

Will radon lower my property values?

That depends on individual buyers. Some might be scared off, whereas others might feel more comfortable knowing the owner has looked for radon and, where applicable, done the remediation.

Does Saskatchewan have radon “hot spots”?

Radon levels vary not only from one geographic area to another, but from house to house. A survey conducted by Health Canada in the 1970s showed that radon levels in certain Canadian cities were higher than in others. However, these same studies showed that it is impossible to predict whether any one house will have a high level of radon. Your home may have very little radon gas, while your neighbour’s house has significant levels.

How safe are multi-unit dwellings?

Based on past experience, multi-story apartment buildings are much less likely to have radon problems.

How safe are public facilities (hospitals and schools)?

Saskatchewan Learning is working with school divisions that wish to have their facilities tested. Initial testing has been completed. For more information, contact Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety – Steve Webster at 306-933-7775.

In the case of health care facilities, officials from Saskatchewan Health will work with Regional Health Authorities and other stakeholder groups to ensure that owners/operators of these facilities have the necessary information to determine the safety of their facilities, and collectively determine if strategies to address radon need to be developed to maintain safe facilities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

A free guide for Canadian homeowners is available at [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#) (CMHC). In partnership with Health Canada, this guide helps identify routes of entry, explains how to measure indoor radon levels, and provides solutions for radon reduction.

The guide also contains a list of federal, provincial and territorial contacts for obtaining further information.

LINKS:

[Health Canada – Changes to Canada’s Radon Guidelines, Background Information](#)
[Health Canada – It’s Your Health - Radon](#)