

HOME  
 COVER STORY

# You can take steps to detect and reduce radon levels

By Amy Howell / ahowell@enquirer.com

This region faces little threat from well-publicized natural disasters such as hurricanes or wildfires, but it faces a greater if less-dramatic killer: radon. The naturally occurring gas that seeps into buildings from the soil is blamed for 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year, according to EPA statistics.

"I didn't know a lot about radon or its long-term effects, but I knew it was bad. We had a two-week-old baby, so that was something I was concerned about," says Michelle Cagwin of Loveland. Last summer, she and her husband, Dave, tested their home for radon as part of a pre-purchase home inspection.

Radon is a radioactive gas that's released by the breakdown of uranium and radium - elements

common in local soil - that can seep into homes.

"It radiates through the concrete. It doesn't have to have a crack," says Alexia Workman, a radon tester with At Home Radon Inc. in Madeira.

The EPA places Hamilton, Butler and Warren counties "in the red" for a high potential of "elevated" levels of indoor radon.

Terrace Park, Symmes Township and Loveland have some of the highest levels in Hamilton County, according to the Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services.

Homes in Clermont, Boone, Campbell and Kenton counties have a "moderate" risk.

"There are little pockets here and there. You can have two houses side by side, and one will have high levels and one won't," says Workman, who has seen some of the highest levels in airtight new homes in West Chester Township, Mason and Morrow.

Because indoor radon levels are not regulated by the government, the EPA recommends that all homeowners conduct a radon test during the winter, when doors and windows are closed.

The 48-hour continuous monitors, available at some local health departments and at most hardware stores for about \$20, usually are placed in the basement, where levels are the highest.

Rates for a third-party tester start at about \$125, Workman says.

If a home has a level higher than 4 pico curies per liter (pCi/L) - considered a "safe" level by the EPA - a professional radon mitigator can seal the sump pump opening with a two-part lid; seal foundation cracks with urethane caulk; line dirt-floor crawl spaces with a heavy-gauge plastic lining; and install a continuous fan that pulls air from under the house and blows it outside.

"We've had reads of 32 pCi/L that we got down to 0.7," Workman says.

Mitigation systems cost \$600-\$1,300.

## Disclosure guidelines

Radon testing is not required as part of a residential real estate transaction.

"The only thing that helps us, presently, is the laws related to disclosure," says Clay Hardwick with the Kentucky Department for Public Health's Radon Gas Program.

"Anything that could cause liability to the seller should be disclosed before the sale, so if a radon test was done and the seller has knowledge of the radon level, it's in their best interest to disclose this information before the sale."

Sellers are not required to test a home for radon before putting it on the market, but they are required to disclose to their Realtor and buyer if the home was tested and found to have elevated radon levels.

A buyer can request that the seller have a radon test performed by a qualified radon tester. The buyer usually pays for the third-party test, just like a home inspection, but can negotiate in the contract to have the seller pay for it.

If the home test shows a radon level higher than 4 pico curies per liter (pCi/L), "it is the seller's responsibility to mitigate the radon, usually. Sometimes they will not cover the cost, so the buyer pays for it," says Mona Hyde, Realtor with Re/Max P&O in Montgomery.

Realtors, by law, are required to disclose to the buyer any information, including radon levels, that they know about the condition of a home.

Amy Howell



The Enquirer / Meggan Booker

Alexia Workman and David Workman, co-owners with John Cordell of At Home Radon Inc. in Madeira, use a continuous radon monitor to test homes.

### Health departments that offer radon test kits

**Butler County residents:** \$10 short-term test kits available year-round. Pick up at: Butler County Health Department, 301 S. Third St., Hamilton, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Friday. 513-863-1770.

**Boone, Campbell, Grant and Kenton county residents:** Free one-year test kits available year-round through the Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department. Call 859-341-4151 to have a kit mailed.

**Warren County residents:** Free short-term test kits available while supplies last through the Warren County Combined Health District. Pick up at: 416 S. East St., Lebanon, or 333 Conover Drive, Suite B, Franklin, 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Friday. 513-695-1220; 937-425-1220.

800-523-4439  
**Kentucky Department for Public Health Radon Gas Program:**  
<http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/info/phps/radongas.htm>; 502-564-4856

### Radon information sources

Find information about radon testing, risks and mitigation at these sources:

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Web site:**

[www.epa.gov/radon](http://www.epa.gov/radon)

**At Home Radon Inc.:** [www.athomeradon.com](http://www.athomeradon.com); 513-561-TEST

**Ohio Department of Health Radon Information Line:**

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