Minnesota Department of Health Fact Sheet June 2008

Radon and Real Estate in Minnesota

Introduction

This fact sheet provides information from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) on radon and how to address radon concerns that may arise during real estate transactions. Its intent is to assist buyers and sellers in making informed decisions about radon. In Minnesota there are only regulations for new construction, so people must decide for themselves how much radon they feel is acceptable in their home. Since a radon problem can be easily identified and fixed, there is typically no reason why radon should be a "deal breaker".

What is radon?

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that continuously decays and releases radiation. Radon is produced from minerals in soil, such as uranium and radium. It is colorless, odorless and tasteless.

Why is radon important?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that each year 21,000 people die of lung cancer as a result of being exposed to elevated levels of radon. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers.

Although radon is present throughout the environment, radon levels indoors are generally higher which increases the risk of cancer.

What is the radon level in my home?

A radon test is the only way to find out how much radon is in your home. Every home is unique due to its local soil, construction details, maintenance and degree of depressurization. Therefore, test results from nearby homes cannot be relied upon to predict the radon level in another home.

MDH recommends that all Minnesota homeowners test their homes for radon. The results of a properly performed radon test will help homeowners determine if they need to take further action to protect their family from the health risks of radon in the home.

At what level should I take action?

The EPA set a recommended action level for radon at 4.0 picoCuries/liter (pCi/L) as advice to the public on how to understand their test results. To use the recommended action level correctly, it should be compared to the annual average level of radon measured in a home.

The EPA and MDH Recommend:
Above 4 pCi/L – Fix your house
2 pCi/L to 4 pCi/L – Consider fixing your house

Recommendations to Sellers

Consider the benefits of testing your house well before you put it on the market. If you demonstrate that radon levels in your home are low based upon the results of a properly conducted radon test may be used as a positive selling point. It may also save time during the selling process. If you find a problem that should be fixed, you will have more time to get it done and may get a better price than if you wait until you are in the middle of the sale.

Recommendations to Buyers

In Minnesota, it is up to the buyer to decide what is an acceptable level of radon risk when purchasing a home. Prospective buyers should keep in mind that it is inexpensive and easy to measure radon and radon levels can be lowered at a fairly reasonable cost.

Role of the real estate professional

Real estate professionals address many aspects of buying and selling homes. However, their licensing prohibits them from offering technical advice regarding radon and health risks unless they are qualified to do so. Instead, they should advise their clients to consult with local health authorities who work on radon issues or the MDH Indoor Air Unit.

Relocation companies and Radon

Sellers and buyers who choose to work with a relocation firm should recognize that their options regarding radon testing and mitigation may be restricted by the terms of their agreement with the company.

MINNESOTA MDH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Indoor Air Unit
625 Robert St N
P.O. Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651-201-4601
www.health.state.mn.us

Radon and Real Estate in Minnesota – page 2

How do you test properly?

The goal of radon testing should be to estimate the annual radon concentration. Since occupant activities, house operations and weather patterns (daily, short-term and seasonal variation) can greatly influence the radon level over short periods of time. The amount of time available until the closing may place practical constraints on the ability to effectively measure annual radon concentrations.

Radon measurement professionals may be used when an unbiased third party is desired. If a professional is hired, MDH recommends selecting a professional who is certified by the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) or by the National Radon Safety Board (NRSB). The list of certified measurement professionals is available on our website at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/air

MDH recommends retesting homes to measure current conditions when: The house has been remodeled, weatherized, or changes made to heating or ventilation systems since the previous radon test.

Short-term tests offer a quick an inexpensive way to "screen" for radon in a home. Short-term tests do not measure the annual average level of radon. They are typically left in place for 2 to 7 days. For a real estate transaction either: conduct two test kits simultaneously or one after another, and the results should be averaged

OR

use of a continuous monitor for a minimum of 48 hours.

Long-term tests should be left in place for a minimum of 90 days. Compared to short-term tests, long-term tests provide results that more accurately reflect the average amount of radon in the home during the year. The best way to estimate a year - round average is to test for a full year. If a year-long test can't be done, the test period should include portions of both heating and cooling seasons.

If the house has been tested for radon, the buyer must decide if the results of past testing are acceptable. Issues to consider include the following:

- **Duration of test.** Long-term tests should span both heating and non-heating seasons. Tests of less than 48 hours are not valid.
- **Timing of test. S**hort-term tests performed during the heating season are more likely to overestimate the year-round average. Short-term tests performed during the non-heating season are more likely to underestimate the year-round average.
- **What area of the home was tested**? Determine if the tested location of the home reflects your anticipated use of the home?
- **Who performed the test?** If a third party performed the test, were they certified by either NEHA or NRSB? Although not a requirement in Minnesota, the use of a certified radon measurement professional is recommended when an outside party is hired to perform radon testing.
- **What level of radon was found?** How does this compare to the level you feel comfortable with?

If a home has not been tested for radon or past testing is not satisfactory, the buyer should decide if they wish to request radon testing. If such a request is made, it is best to bring it up as early as possible.

When a buyer asks for radon testing prior to a home purchase, MDH recommends specifying the following conditions (these may be included into the contract if desired) because buyers and sellers are free to negotiate and respond as they choose to the issue of radon during a real estate transaction. This includes any determination of what radon levels need mitigation and who will pay for it.

- Who will perform the test
- Type of test (Short-term, Long-term, Continuous monitor)
- Area of the home to be tested
- When the test will be done
- How results will be shared between parties
- Who will pay for testing, and
- How the results will be used

How is a radon problem fixed?

A number of steps can be taken to lower the amount of radon in a home. A quality radon reduction (mitigation) system is often able to reduce the annual average radon level to below 2pCi/L. Experienced radon mitigation professionals are available and can install appropriate mitigation systems. A list of certified mitigators is available on our website at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/air

IC#141-0303