People Urged to Test Homes for Radon

(KTNC) --  The Nebraska Radon Program is spreading the word about the risks of radon exposure during January, which is National Radon Action Month.

 Radon is a colorless, odorless, naturally occurring gas that originates in the soil and can build to dangerous levels in homes.  Since it is radioactive, it is very damaging to lung tissue when people breathe it.  The EPA attributes approximately 21,000 lung cancer deaths a year to radon exposure.

 Sarah Morgan, the Indoor Air Quality Program Manager at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, says anytime is a good time to test your home for radon but winter is the best time, as this is the time of year when radon levels are highest in homes.

 Morgan says it's fairly easy to test your home for radon. Do-it-yourself test kits are available for as little as $8, and Morgan says some people may have access to free test kits.  She says the kits have easy-to-follow instructions.  Testing involves placing the test kit in your home for a few days then mailing it back to the laboratory.

 While there is no safe level of radon in a home, and even low levels can increase risk, Morgan says they strongly recommend people take action to mitigate the radon levels for any reading above 4.

 If you have an elevated radon level in your home, Morgan suggests contacting a licensed contractor to install a radon mitigation system.  Those systems can vent the radon from a home, and Morgan says they can be installed relatively inexpensively, sometimes for under $1,000.

 The Nebraska Radon Program website – www.dhhs.ne.gov/radon - has information on how to get a radon test kit. The site also has maps and tables that show radon averages across the state, as well as how many homes have been tested and the percentage of homes that test high.

 Morgan says the southeast and northeast parts of Nebraska are considered "hot spots" for high radon levels.  Every county in far southeast Nebraska has average radon levels above the 4.0 threshold.

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