

IMPACT

UAF Cooperative Extension Service

Radon testing and mitigation assistance help residents with higher radon levels

Issue

Every year approximately 20,000 Americans die from lung cancer as a result of breathing in radioactive radon gas at their homes, schools and workplaces. You can't see or smell radon, but there are easy methods to sample room air and have it analyzed for the average radon concentration. Testing is important in Alaska as subsurface uranium exists in many areas of the state. As uranium decays, radon gas is released.

No local or state regulations require testing. Alaska residents are responsible for checking their buildings' radon levels and mitigating radon levels, if necessary.

Response

Extension has provided educational outreach on radon for more than 30 years. Environmental Protection Agency funding supported a joint effort with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources to distribute complimentary radon testing kits from July of 2019 to June of 2020. Public service announcements and other outreach were effective in driving people to get 944 complimentary test kits during this period. Many residents became aware of radon concerns following a major earthquake in Southcentral Alaska in November 2018. Residents were encouraged to test for radon because of potentially new subsurface pathways for radon to enter homes.

Extension also answered radon questions received through the Alaska Radon Hotline (800-478-8324) and provided information about radon through state fairs, conference booths and workshops.



Short- and long-term test kits are used to check radon levels.

Results

Of those individuals who received test kits, 644 tested and received valid results on radon levels in their buildings. Around 19 percent of those tests showed radon levels in excess of the Environmental Protection Agency's action level. EPA recommends mitigation at 4 picocuries of radon per liter or higher. Many of these residents received technical assistance after calling the radon hotline. They asked for information on how to either mitigate their own homes or where to contact professionals who mitigate. This successful radon outreach program spreads actionable knowledge.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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