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'Shocking' number of county homes test high for radon

By *TERRY RINDFLEISCH* / *La Crosse Tribune*

More than half of the homes tested for radon earlier this year had levels above the recommended limits, a result one county health official Monday called "quite shocking."

Test results from 258 homes showed 55 percent contained radon above the recommended limit of 4 picoCuries per liter of air, Jim Steinhoff, environmental health specialist for the La Crosse County Health Department, said.

"It was quite shocking that we had so many high tests," Steinhoff said. "It's one of the reasons we want to get radon test kits in the hands of people, to see if their homes are at risk."

More than 400 radon detection kits had been sold during a promotion as part of Radon Action Month in January. Those whose homes exceeded the limit should repeat the test, Steinhoff said. If a repeat test comes back elevated, then homeowners need to contact professionals for long-term solutions that can take three to 12 months, he said. Earlier tests showed about 30 percent in La Crosse County had elevated radon but only 10 percent were at higher than recommended levels, he said. "That's a dramatic increase," he said.

Tests in the city of La Crosse showed 45 percent exceeded levels, while 42 percent of Onalaska homes were about the recommended levels, Steinhoff said.

Radon, a radioactive gas, comes from the natural decay of uranium found in nearly all soils, Steinhoff said. It moves up through the ground to the air above and into homes through cracks and other holes in the foundation, he said. It is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and the leading cause among nonsmokers. It causes an estimated 21,000 lung cancer deaths a year.

About 1 in 15 homes in the United States is estimated to have elevated radon levels, he said. Steinhoff said the radon risk is higher in Wisconsin due to soil types.

Radon test kits

Available for \$5 at La Crosse County libraries in Onalaska, Holmen, West Salem and Bangor and the La Crosse County Health Department. For more information on radon, call toll-free 1-888-LOW-RADON or go online at www.lowradon.org.

Free session on fixing problems

The La Crosse County Health Department will hold a free session on fixing radon problems in homes from 6 to 7 p.m., Wednesday at the Onalaska Public Library, 741 Oak Ave. S. Representatives from three companies that fix radon problems will be at the meeting.

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