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Tasteless and Odorless

Health Department giving out free, at-home radon test kits

When a gas is odorless and tasteless, how do you know if it's reaching dangerous levels: You test for it.

January is National Radon Action Month, and Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department (BLDHD) is again helping area residents ensure safe radon levels in their homes, schools, and offices by offering free test kits. The annual campaign is called "Give a Can, Get a Kit." To participate, residents exchange nonperishable food items and/or toiletries for a free radon test kit at our Benzonia and Lake Leelanau offices.

"The annual program began in 2020 and, last year, BLDHD provided 50 radon test kits to the community during National Radon Action Month," said Eric Johnston, Environmental Director. "In addition to helping residents test for radon in their homes—something that should be done every two years—we donated the items we collected to two area non-profit human service organizations to help those in need."

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas. You cannot see, smell or taste radon gas and there are no short-term effects that warn you of exposure.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, behind smoking, resulting in an estimated 21,000 deaths annually, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Radon exposure is highly preventable and can be mitigated at a relatively low cost to homeowners.

To help residents learn more about radon levels in their county, Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has created a [one stop website](#). The site has a search-by-county function where residents can learn about average radon levels, contact information for the local health department and state radon officer, and access more educational resources on radon.

Measuring Levels

Radon is measured in picocuries per liter, with a symbol of pCi/l. One pCi/l means that in 1 liter of air, there will be 2.2 radioactive breakdowns each minute. The average national indoor radon level is 1.3 pCi/L. Our jurisdiction's average:

- Benzie: 1.6 pCi/L
- Leelanau: 1.4 pCi/L

The EPA has established 4 pCi/l as its action level, which is where mitigation is recommended.

Testing every two years is recommended as homes settle and slight cracks in the foundation of a home can result in changing radon levels. Elevated radon levels can be reduced by installing radon reduction systems to help reduce radon to acceptable levels.

Radon test kits can be traded for a nonperishable food or toiletry item at our Benzonia and Lake Leelanau offices, Monday-Friday between 8 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-4:30 p.m. until January 31, 2023. For additional information about radon test kits, please call 231-882-4409.

For additional information about radon, visit the [Environmental Protection Agency's site](#). For an instructional video on how to use a test kit, click [here](#).

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