

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

SCHOOL RADON TESTING PROGRAM

Interpretation of Radon Testing Results

WHAT IS RADON?

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is odorless, colorless and tasteless. It comes from the natural decay of uranium that is found in nearly all soils in the United States. Radon gas is in the air, both inside and outside. When people are outside, the radon levels are so low that they pose no health threat. Unfortunately, radon gas inside homes and schools can build up to levels that become unhealthy.

WHY IS RADON A PROBLEM?

National studies have found that exposure to radon is linked to lung cancer. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, after cigarette smoking. There is no scientific evidence that children are at a higher risk than adults from radon. The risk estimates are based on exposure over a lifetime, and most lung cancer cases occur after age 60. Radon does not appear to be linked to any other diseases, such as asthma.

When considering the risk to children, keep in mind that children spend 12 percent of their time in school and more than 75 percent of their time at home, during the year. It is important to test schools for radon; it is even more important to test your home and mitigate if there are high levels of radon

HOW DO I READ THE SCHOOL RADON TEST RESULTS?

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recommends that all frequently occupied rooms (such as classrooms and offices) that are in contact with the ground, or are directly above unoccupied areas of the basement, should be tested.

Every first-floor or basement room tested should have a number; you may need to ask for the coding scheme if the numbers are codes. Each room should have an entry on the test results form next to the units “pCi/L,” or “picocuries per liter.” That is its radon concentration.

WHAT LEVEL OF RADON IS A PROBLEM AND HOW CAN IT BE FIXED?

The DEP and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommend that action be taken to reduce levels if the concentration of radon is 4 pCi/L or higher. For school rooms with levels of 4 pCi/L or more, venting systems can be installed that vent radon gas from below the ground to the outside, where it is quickly diluted to very low levels. Sometimes heating-ventilation-air

conditioning systems are adjusted to increase ventilation or air pressure so that radon levels are reduced.

SHOULD CHILDREN BE RELOCATED IF RADON LEVELS ARE HIGH?

EPA recommends that if radon concentrations are near 100 pCi/L, schools should contact the state radon office (see contact information below), and consider relocating until levels are reduced. In many cases, levels of radon can temporarily be reduced by: 1) increasing ventilation, to dilute the radon, or 2) increasing air pressure, to keep radon from entering the classroom.

For further information, contact:

**New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Radon Section
(800) 648-0394 or (609) 984-5425
www.njradon.org**

8/2/06