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Media contact: Jonathan Modie; 971-246-9139; PHD.Communications@state.or.us

Test helps homeowner reduce high levels of cancer-causing radon *Oregon Radon Program says kits are simple, inexpensive to use*

When Bruce Feller decided to have his century-old home in Northeast Portland tested for radon in early 2012, he figured he was living with low, safe levels of the radioactive gas.

After all, just a year before, he completed a major remodeling project that turned the largest of three rooms in his basement into an airtight, sound-proof office, with every concrete surface covered with insulation and sheet rock, not to mention a waterproof barrier under new flooring. And 25 years earlier, a test of the basement laundry room showed only “marginal” radon levels.

But when the 2012 test came back, he was shocked by what he learned: The radon level in his new basement office, where he’d spent many hours of each day over the previous year, was nearly seven times higher than what his laundry room test showed in 1987.

Radon is measured in picocuries per liter (pCi/L). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends homeowners take steps to fix the problem when radon concentrations exceed 4 pCi/L. The World Health Organization standards are even more stringent – its “action level” is 2.7 pCi/L. Feller’s remodeled basement came in at 25 picocuries per liter.

“It was astronomically higher,” said Feller, a financial representative with Broad River. “I think we did the test twice and that’s what it was. Here I had already been working in this basement at least a year.”

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January is National Radon Action Month and the Oregon Radon Program is working with EPA to educate people about the dangers of radon and to urge people to test their homes.

Radon is the No. 2 cause of lung cancer after smoking and kills more than 21,000 Americans every year. Radon is a radioactive gas, and like all other forms of radiation, you can't see, smell or taste it. But radon could be in your home at dangerous levels.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas that comes from the ground and can be found throughout Oregon. It can get into any type of building or home and can build up to unsafe levels. People are most likely to get their greatest exposure at home, where they spend most of their time.

Testing homes for radon is simple and inexpensive. Radon test kits can be purchased at local hardware and home improvement stores, or directly from radon testing companies. Many test kits are priced between \$10 and \$25. The American Lung Association in Oregon (ALAO) offers test kits for \$14, which includes the cost of shipping, handling and analysis.

Residents who find high radon levels in their homes can contact a qualified contractor to fix the problem. Visit the Oregon Radon Program's website at www.healthoregon.org/radon for a list of qualified contractors in Oregon as well as a link to ALAO test kits.

"We recommend that every home be tested for radon," Sherry said. "It is possible for one home in a neighborhood to test high and neighboring homes to test low. You never know unless you test."

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In 2010, the Oregon Legislature passed new legislation that addresses radon. These laws created building codes that minimize radon entry into new residential structures built in Baker, Clackamas, Hood River, Multnomah, Polk, Washington and Yamhill counties. The law took effect April 1, 2011. These requirements also apply to all new public buildings, including schools, effective April 1, 2013.

To take care of his radon problem, Feller hired a contractor who installed a pump that pulls air from below the foundation, through a pipe that expels above the roof like a chimney. While he wishes he had known about the radon before he did his basement remodel so he could hide the PVC pipe behind drywall, he says he's relieved to know the radon concentration in his basement is now at 2.0 pCi/L.

“There are so many things around us you cannot control that are cancer-causing. We don't know how long it takes for things like radon to affect your health, so if you have the opportunity to avoid a cancerous invasion in your atmosphere, why wouldn't you take it?” he says. “If you have children in the house, you're crazy if you don't do it.”

For more information about radon, radon testing and mitigation, and radon-resistant new construction, or to order a test kit online, call the Oregon Radon Program at 971-673-0440 or visit Oregon Radon Program's [website](#) or EPA's [website](#).

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