

## **Radon Gas – It's Perfectly Safe, Just Don't Breathe Too Deeply**

Question: What odorless, colorless gas kills 1600 Canadians each year, more than the total of those who die by drowning, fires, plane crashes combined? The answer – radon gas – may not be a household word but the most likely place to find it might be just down the stairs in your basement.

Radon Gas is produced by the natural decay of uranium and thorium in the Earth and finds its way to the surface through cracks and fissures. Dissipated in open air radon is harmless, but concentrated in poorly ventilated basements and crawlspaces – because it's eight times heavier than air – the stuff can turn deadly.

Radon breaks down quite rapidly into particles called “radon daughters” and these in turn disintegrate within milliseconds, releasing highly charged alpha particles that can damage sensitive bronchial and lung tissue, leading to lung cancer.

The World Health Organization now recognizes radon as the second leading cause of lung cancer worldwide, trailing only cigarette smoking.

So what to do? Declare the basement off-limits? Burn down the house? Well, actually, frightening as cancer sounds, you can reduce the risk pretty much to zero, and the place to begin is to determine whether or not you have radon in your house.

Health Canada's studies have shown that, if you're in BC, there isn't too much chance that you live in a house with radon issues. Throughout the Province, less than one in ten homes tested has shown levels high enough to cause concern. The thing about these gases that come oozing up from the ground, though, is that you can't predict with any certainty where they're going to show up. For example, in some parts of the Kootenays and the North Thompson areas, close to 25% of houses have radon levels that are not healthy.

If a person is interested in knowing the levels in the place they are living, or working for that matter, there are testers available online that, once installed, will continuously monitor radon levels. Another option is to hire a professional inspection company to come and do the job for you. There are several in the Shuswap and North Okanagan area, if the idea of setting up your basement as a science lab doesn't appeal.

If you are unlucky enough to be one of the few who owns a house with a radon problem, relax, there's still no need to panic. Most of the time, solutions can be as easy as installing a fan or opening your windows a bit more often - it's not very often that fixing the problem is very expensive. What may be important is to know if there is a problem in the first place.

Radon is more often found in older buildings that have dirt crawlspaces and cracked basement floors. Open floor drain and unsealed pipes poking through foundation walls are also likely entrance spots. Since the 1980's houses have been designed to minimize the amount of outside gas entering the building. Most of the times this works but, like everything else in life, there are exceptions to the rule.

More information on radon gas can be found through the Health Canada website: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) or at [www.clarioninspections.ca](http://www.clarioninspections.ca)

Raul Poole, Clarion Home Inspection