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# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet

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## Radon in Your Home: An Overview for New Hampshire Homeowners

### **RADON OCCURRENCE IN A HOME**

Radon is a naturally-occurring radioactive gas that is commonly found in bedrock and in water from bedrock (drilled) wells in New Hampshire. Radon gas is colorless, odorless and tasteless.

Radon gas finds its way into indoor air mainly by migrating from bedrock, through the soil and into the home via cracks or other openings in the foundation. Radon from bedrock wells is released into indoor air during showering, dishwashing and doing laundry. Dug wells and point wells tend to have minimal to no radon. The amount of radon released from stone building materials, such as granite-block foundations, fireplace materials, counter tops, and floor or wall tiles, is usually insignificant.

### **HEALTH RISK and MEASUREMENT**

Exposure to radon poses an increased risk of developing certain types of cancer, primarily lung cancer and stomach cancer. Radon concentrations in both air and water are measured in picocuries per liter (pCi/L). A general rule of thumb is that for every 10,000 pCi/L of radon in a home's water supply, the radon concentration in indoor air is increased by 1 pCi/L.

### **RADON RISK FROM AIR**

The increased risk of lung cancer is due to inhalation of radon-laden indoor air, including any radon entering the building through the water supply. (There is also an increased risk of stomach cancer due to ingesting radon in drinking water.) Any amount of radon in air or water increases one's risk of lung cancer; the greater the amount, the larger the risk. Radon is the leading environmental cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. and the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. Exposure to a combination of radon gas and cigarette smoke creates a greater risk for lung cancer than either factor alone. Long-term exposure to radon leads to the deaths of an estimated 100 New Hampshire residents each year.

## **RADON RISK FROM YOUR HOME'S WATER SUPPLY**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has indicated that the inhalation of radon in air poses a much greater risk than radon in your water. It is always recommended that homeowners test their airborne radon in the home, as this presents the greater risk (see REDUCING HEALTH RISK below).

There are no federal or state standards for radon in drinking water. However, there are public health advisories for radon in drinking water, including that issued by USEPA. NHDES recommends the following:

- For private wells with radon concentrations at or above 10,000 pCi/L, the treatment of water is recommended in conjunction with mitigation of indoor air radon. Homeowners should consult with radon mitigation and water treatment providers.
- For private wells with radon concentrations between 2,000 and 10,000 pCi/L, the treatment of water may be advisable if air concentrations in the home exceed 4 pCi/L.
- When radon in well water is below 4,000 pCi/L, you should retest air and water every three to five years.

## **REDUCING HEALTH RISK**

The U.S. Surgeon General and USEPA recommend testing for radon in air in all living spaces below the third floor. The U.S. Congress has set a long-term goal that indoor air radon levels be no more than outdoor levels, which average around 0.4 pCi/L. While this goal is not yet technologically achievable in all cases, radon in most homes today can be reduced to 2 pCi/L or below and USEPA strongly recommends treatment when the radon indoor air concentration exceeds 4 pCi/L. Approximately 27,000 cancer deaths can be expected for every 1 million persons exposed for a "lifetime" (70 years) at 4 pCi/L. Radon mitigation is achieved mainly through reducing the passage of radon through foundations and, in some cases, treating bedrock well water to remove radon.

## **TESTING FOR RADON**

**Testing for Radon in Air** – Both short-term and long-term testing methods are available. For information on testing radon in air, check with a local laboratory, visit the [USEPA Radon](#) webpage, call (800) 767-7236, or search the internet for "USEPA Where Can I Get a Radon Test Kit?" NHDES recommends using nationally certified radon-in-air measurement providers before investing in a radon mitigation system. Certified radon service providers can be found online on the [National Radon Safety Board](#) and [NRPP Certified Radon Mitigation Professional](#) websites.

**Testing Water for Radon** – To find a laboratory that offers radon testing for drinking water, search the internet for "radon testing." Radon concentrations in well water can vary substantially from one test to another. NHDES recommends at least two radon tests (at least one month apart when possible), prior to making any treatment decisions. Because radon is not the only potentially harmful radioactive substance commonly found in New Hampshire well water, NHDES also recommends testing water from private bedrock wells for uranium and analytical gross alpha; some laboratories offer these tests as a package along with radon. A well that has high levels of radon is more likely to have high levels of uranium and/or gross alpha.

## **Radon Measurement and Mitigation Service Providers and Equipment Suppliers**

Since January 1, 2015, all *radon-in-air mitigation* designers and installers must be nationally certified to perform those services in New Hampshire. Certification is *not* required for radon-in-air testing or for radon-in-water treatment, but some radon-in-air testing providers are nationally-certified. Certified radon service providers can

be found online on the [National Radon Safety Board](#) and [NRPP Certified Radon Mitigation Professional](#) websites. Suppliers of radon water treatment devices can be found on the internet.

#### **Additional Resources**

- [NH Department of Health and Human Services radon program](#) website.
- [A Citizen's Guide To Radon, The Guide to Protecting Yourself and Your Family From Radon](#) (USEPA, 2012).
- Information and publications about all aspects of radon at <http://www.epa.gov/radon>.
- Risk Assessment of Radon in Drinking Water (National Academy of Sciences, 1999), available at [www.nap.edu](http://www.nap.edu)

#### **For More Information**

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or [dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov](mailto:dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov), or visit our website at [des.nh.gov](http://des.nh.gov).

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of June 2019. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.