For Immediate Release

Family plans mitigation after learning home contains high levels of radon

MORGANTOWN, WV (January 10, 2019) — Whitney Hagedorn’s husband owns an excavating business and when he saw radon testing information at Monongalia County Health Department while picking up permits, he decided it was time to make an appointment.

“We were told that we were in a belt where they were finding it, so we decided to get our home tested as well as my mother-in-law’s home tested,” said Whitney Hagedorn, a Morgantown resident. “Fortunately, her house tested negative, but ours was positive. We’re glad that we did it.”

By “positive,” Hagedorn means that her home had a radon level that was 4 picocuries per liter or higher. In her family’s case, it was 4.8 picocuries per liter, a measurement of radiation.

Radon is an odorless, colorless gas that is the result of radioactive metals breaking down in rocks, soil and groundwater. It can then seep into homes and accumulate. Exposure to radon occurs primarily by inhaling air that comes through cracks and gaps in buildings and homes.

Radon is a natural element from the earth, so exposure to small doses of the gas is constant. Exposure to high levels of radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, after cigarettes.

About 1 in 5 homes in Monongalia County is found to have radon compared to 1 in 15 nationally, said Joe Lawson, a Radon Measurement Specialist certified through the National Radon Safety Board who also works as a registered sanitarian at MCHD Environmental Health. Those figures come from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
“Monongalia County is in a region known to have high radon levels,” Lawson said. “That is why it is important to get your home tested for radon. Long-term exposure to radon gas can lead to lung cancer. It’s estimated in the United States that 21,000 people die per year from exposure to radon gas.”

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that all homes in the country get tested for radon. January is National Radon Action Month. The cold weather in winter, when homes are typically more closed up, is an ideal time to have homes tested for radon. It’s also the month to emphasize the EPA’s National Radon Action Plan, which has a goal of reducing radon risk in 5 million U.S. homes by 2020, which would save an estimated 3,200 lives.

Owners of homes that have higher levels of radon can undergo mitigation that will reduce the amount of radon that accumulates. The average cost of mitigation is $1,500. New homes can be built to be radon-resistant.

Because Hagedorn’s husband is an excavator, he will be able to do the mitigation work himself on their home, which he plans to do this spring. “He will have to tear up the floor in the basement to put a remediation system in,” Whitney Hagedorn said.

“It’s a little bit of an undertaking but it’s something that has to be done,” she added. “I’m a nurse, so I know what radon gas can cause.”

To conduct the test, Lawson went to the Hagedorns’ home and set up a continuous radon monitor, which remained in place for two days taking measurements.

“It was very easy,” Hagedorn said. “He came in and set it up in a few minutes and it didn’t affect our life at all. We just kept doors and windows closed to get an accurate reading.”

Lawson returned for the machine, she added. “And then we got test results by email two weeks after that.”

Because of a grant, MCHD Environmental Health currently can conduct radon tests for half price—$62.50—compared to the usual cost of $125. Hagedorn said she had wanted to get her circa-1920 home tested several years ago, but back then, the test was not as affordable as it is now.

For more information about radon or to set up a test, call MCHD Environmental Health at 304-598-5131. You can also find more information and request a test online at monchd.org/environmental.
For more information on MCHD, check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and safety.