

Radon facts for property owners

During a recent real estate transaction, a Farmington home tested positive for radon, prompting the seller to install mitigation systems for the sale to be finalized.

It's not uncommon for such routine tests in the home buying process to turn up positive for radon, especially in areas where higher-than-normal levels are suspected and in homes built on what are known as "floating" slabs.

While the responsibility for testing and mitigation ultimately falls on property owners, Farmington town officials feel the recent case provides a good opportunity to educate residents about radon.

Radon is a radioactive noble gas that comes from the decay of radium in the soil. It is a colorless, odorless, invisible gas that can only be detected through the use of proper equipment. Chronic exposure to elevated radon levels has been linked to an increased incidence of lung cancer in underground miners.

The radon concentration in a home is dependant on the type of soil the home is built on. Cracks, openings and various penetrations in the building foundation will provide the pathway for the radon in the soil to enter the home. The ventilation rate and air flow patterns within a house are important factors that will affect how much radon will be pulled into different areas within the house.

The DEC estimates 20 percent of homes in Farmington have elevated levels of radon. Not sure if your home is among them? Testing is a simple process that can be done with a store-bought kit or by a radon testing business.

There are several ways to reduce radon levels in a home. One of the most widely used methods reroutes the radon gas from the soil away from the house by venting the soil gas from beneath the basement to a point above the roof.

Those who are building in an area known to have a high probability of elevated radon levels can take steps during construction to reduce the radon levels. Farmington's Building Department closely oversees new buildings and, when buildings go up in areas where there are known elevated levels, code enforcement officers generally require extra testing and mitigation measures.

For more information, contact the Building Department at (315) 986-8197 or visit www.nysradon.org.