

Three Iowa counties among those to plan radon outreach activities, earn free test kits

By: Scott Berry, NACo Environmental Intern

Beginning January 1, counties across the nation will lead activities and host special events to increase awareness of the health effects of radon exposure and to promote radon testing, mitigation, and radon-resistant new construction. To assist in this effort, NACo has awarded twenty-four counties and coalitions of counties, including Cerro Gordo, Grundy, and Linn Counties, 200 free radon test kits through its County Radon Outreach Program. The test kits, supplied by NACo, were awarded to these counties for their innovative radon outreach and education efforts concentrated in diverse and low income population areas.

Cerro Gordo County will target local daycare centers as one of the groups to receive its test kits. The county plans on utilizing radon awareness education specific to radon's effects on children as well as vouchers for free kits to all local childcare facilities. The county will also target low-income, elderly, and disabled residents as the most in need of the remaining test kits. The county will also establish a radon outreach program to support these groups and assist them in obtaining their free kits. This is in conjunction with an awareness campaign on the importance of home testing including promoting the availability of test kits, changes to the county website, press releases, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and radio interviews.

Grundy County will attend a health fair hosted by a local hospital and a local insurance company to distribute educational materials and test kits. Presentations are also planned for local elementary school children about radon and its health effects. These presentations will also include a poster contest for middle school children. The winning design will be printed on t-shirts. The county will also craft press releases for the local paper reminding citizens to have their homes tested and mitigated if necessary.

Linn County will partner with Cedar County to connect diverse populations including urban, rural, and farming communities. The county has planned an aggressive awareness campaign that includes radio and newspaper announcements, USEPA PSAs, and a proclamation from the Board of Supervisors that will declare the month of January as Radon Awareness Month. The county will also host educational meetings in low-income neighborhoods at both urban neighborhood associations and local Farm Bureau meetings.

Radon is a naturally occurring, invisible, and odorless radioactive gas. It originates from natural deposits of radium in the soil. As the radium decays it turns into radon gas which can enter a home. Radon enters a home due to indoor air vacuums that cause the radon laden soil gas to enter through the foundation.

The only way to know if a home has a radon problem is to test. Every home should be tested, regardless of age, construction style, or previous testing results. The cost of reducing radon exposure in the home typically compares to other common home repair investments. And, these mitigation techniques DO work!

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the country surpassed only by direct smoking, and the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. It is ranked by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) as a Group A Carcinogen, which places it in the highest ranking for cancer potential, and in the same category as tobacco. The USEPA has found that radon is responsible for about 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year.

The twenty-four counties and coalitions to earn the free test kits through this effort are: Calhoun County, AL; Delta, San Miguel, Gunnison, Ouray and Hinsdale Counties, CO; Cerro Gordo County, IA; Grundy County, IA; Linn County, IA; McHenry County, IL; Pike County, KY; Blue Earth County, MN; Pipestone County, MN; Rice County, MN; Rock County, MN; Flathead County, MT; Judith Basin County, MT; Lewis and Clark County, MT; Sheridan County, MT; Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster Counties, NE; Cuming County, NE; Douglas County, NE; Sherman County, NE; Bernalillo County, NM; Albany County, NY; Butler County, OH; Licking County, OH; and Pierce County, WI.

To learn how your county can plan radon outreach efforts in coordination with National Radon Action Month, contact Kelly Zonderwyk at kzonderwyk@naco.org or 202.942.4224.