

Radon a hazard in county

Officials recommend that everybody test their homes at least once for radon.

By **ANGIE MASON**
Daily Record/Sunday News

When Steve Voorhees and his wife were buying their Franklin Township home years ago, their real estate agent recommended they get it tested for radon.

The test came back showing a radon level of 140 picocuries — the measurement used for radon — per liter. Officials recommend taking action to reduce levels higher than 4.

"My wife and I had a lot of anxiety," he said, but the agent assured him it could be fixed.

Voorhees had a mitigation system installed. Years later, a test measured just about 0.5. Now a real estate agent himself, Voorhees said he urges clients to get homes tested.

"Don't be scared of it because you can get it mitigated," he said.

Radon is an odorless, colorless gas that comes from decaying uranium. It's the second-leading cause of lung cancer, and the No. 1 cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. January is National Radon Action Month.

"It's a problem every-



DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS
— KATE PENN

This gauge, attached to a radon reduction system in the basement of Steve Voorhees' home, measures when a fan on the system is working properly. A fan pulls the radon from the soil beneath the home to the outdoors.

where. Every house has it," said Bob Meyer, owner of Central Penn Radon of Wellsville. "Some houses just have higher levels than others."

Meyer said the most common fix is to install an active soil depressurization system. With that, a hole is drilled through the concrete slab in a basement, a pipe is run to the outside, and a fan sucks the soil gas from beneath the concrete to the outdoors. There are other measures, such as sealing cracks, that can help, too.

See **RADON**, page 5C

Radon

Winter is the best time to test because homes are closed up, and the heat is on.

Continued from 1C

Radon testing is often done during real estate transactions, Meyer said, when the buyer asks for a test to be done. But no one ever expects the level to be too high.

"They're always shocked," he said. "You don't think about it because you can't see it smell it or taste it. If it left a mark somewhere that you'd see every day, it was in your face, you'd do something about it."

Dave Allard, director of the state Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Radiation Protection, said that radon issues were first discovered in the mid-1980s.

"We've come to find out we really do have problems in this country with indoor radon," he said. York and Adams counties have among the higher rates in the state, he said.

"We want everybody to test their homes at least once," he said.

Bob Lewis, program manager for the bureau's radon division, said geology and soil characteristics predispose York and Adams counties to having higher levels of radon. He and a co-worker are working on a project that delves



DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS — KATE PENN

Bob Meyer, owner of Central Penn Radon, explains how a radon reduction system in Steve Voorhees' home works. Meyer said homeowners always are shocked to find out their homes have elevated levels of radon.

deeper into state statistics, he said, and it looks like Pennsylvania could be among the worst in the country.

Winter is the best time to test, Allard said, because homes are closed up, and the heat is on.

The state does a lot of outreach and works with the American Lung Association to try to encourage homeowners, schools and others to test for radon. If the state learns that a house has tested with a high level of radon, they might do a "hot spot" study, reaching out to other residents in the neighborhood or the municipality.

Allard said radon testing is voluntary, but he'd like to see some sort of requirement that it be done during property transfers.

"I think that's the only way we're going to be able to get all of the properties in the commonwealth over time," he said.

amazon@ydr.com; 771-2048

Online

Radon causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States, and about 2,900 of those are in people who do not smoke, according to the American Lung Association. Breathing radon and smoking greatly increases the risk of lung cancer, more than either do separately, according to the association.

Learn more at www.lungsusa.org.

January is National Radon Action Month. Learn more at www.epa.gov/radon. The site includes some information about how to get a home tested for radon.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection also has radon resources online. Visit www.depweb.state.pa.us and click on "Radiation protection." Under "radon division," you can search for average radon test data by zip code.