



Michigan radon specialist says more tests are needed in Detroit

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SPEAKERS

Nargis Rahman, Leslie Smith III

Rob Reinhart 00:00

And we're going to open up the show by noting an anniversary. It was 33 years ago today, a groundbreaking win for the rights of millions of Americans was made law. July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA, was signed into law making equal access to employment, transportation, public spaces and more a legal right. But advocates say those rights need to evolve with the changing times. And joining me now to further along the discussion is *CultureShift's* Amanda LeClaire. Hello.

Leslie Smith III 00:00

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas. It is odorless, colorless and tasteless. It is always present in the natural environment. It comes from the breakdown of uranium rock in the soil and in the rock below our homes that are sitting on the planet. Uranium and radon are present all over the planet, including here in our state. All homes that are in direct contact with the soil, regardless of foundation type have some measurable level of radon in it.

Nargis Rahman 00:27

What are some risks of having radon in our homes?

Leslie Smith III 00:30

The risk with radon is it's known to be the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers. Particularly the risk is when radon levels build up in the homes to levels that are unhealthy for our lungs. Being a radioactive gas, the radiation from radon can scar our lung tissue over several years of exposure to elevated levels. Something like 7 out of 1,000 people are expected to develop lung cancer at four picocuries per liter, and those are people who are never smokers. For people who have smoked or have ever smoked, that risk jumps up to 62 per 1,000. There are no outward symptoms that come with being exposed to radon. It does not cause rashes. It doesn't cause fevers or headaches or nausea or fatigue.

Nargis Rahman 01:12



And so it's very hard to tell if you have it without getting tested. Is that right?

Leslie Smith III 01:17

That's right. We here at EGLE, we distribute radon test kits to our radon partners around the state including here in the city of Detroit as well as in Wayne County and the surrounding counties to test their own home.

Nargis Rahman 01:29

And how often do you encourage people to get their homes tested?

Leslie Smith III 01:32

If they've never tested before, this is a great time to do it, particularly during the winter because you want to maintain closed-house conditions. Meaning you want to keep the exterior doors closed during the testing time which is three to seven days. If that initial test is low under the action level, which is four picocuries per liter, it's recommended that you test again every two years. If the radon levels are high, don't panic, we recommend that you test again, do some additional testing. If that longer term test comes back elevated then it's recommended you take steps to reduce your radon exposure in your home. That could be a radon mitigation system, a system designed to pull radon from underneath the home and discharge it outdoors, certain additional sealing of any cracks or large openings to the soil in the home, particularly if they're in the basement or in a crawlspace to reduce the entry of radon from the soil below into the home.

Nargis Rahman 02:20

Can you expand on other ways that radon might be getting into homes?

Leslie Smith III 02:23

Three primary ways that radon gets pulled into our homes and all of it has to do with air pressure changes: One of the ways is during the winter months we heat our homes creating an air temperature difference in the home. Warm air rises as it becomes lighter and it rises it goes out of our tops of our roof. That creates a back effect in our homes, kind of draws the radon up from the soil into our homes and out. The second way is changes in weather conditions outside, changes in natural air pressure. When weather events like storm systems are moving through the area, lower air pressure can cause radon to move more readily from the soil into our homes. And the other way is the use of mechanical devices like your dryers, your exhaust fans, anything that's moving air from the home and exhausting outside creates a little bit of a negative air pressure indoors. It comes in through the smallest of cracks in the foundation. Areas where the floors and the walls meet, in a basement, loose fitting utilities, through the floors and sidewalls. It can travel through four block walls in the basement, dirt floors in the crawlspace.

Nargis Rahman 03:29



Would you say that minority communities are disproportionately impacted by radon because of living in inner cities? And how are those communities impacted?

Leslie Smith III 03:37

Access to radon testing. Minority communities typically have more rental housing than in other communities. Testing and then having their landlord take responsibility for addressing the radon levels can be a challenge. Third one is affordability of putting in a radon mitigation system can be a deterrent, but we want to encourage both. So please test, you know at least to know what the radon levels are in your home and then we can move to trying to find ways to reduce those radon levels.

Nargis Rahman 04:04

And can you talk about Wayne County and Detroit? What are the radon levels in this community?

Leslie Smith III 04:10

We have a radon map on our website at michigan.gov/radon. What you're seeing overall for the Detroit area is that the lighter green color is showing that many of the areas that have tested are less than two picocuries, but when you look a little bit closer, you'll see that there's little circles in most of these areas. So little circles show that there's very few tests.