Radon

What is radon?
Radon is a naturally occurring, invisible, odorless gas that comes from deposits of uranium in soil, rock and water. It is harmlessly dispersed in outdoor air, but when trapped in buildings can be a hazard, especially at elevated levels.

Where is radon found?
The primary source of high levels of radon in the home is the surrounding soil. Radon has been found in elevated levels in homes in every state.

How does radon get into my home?
Warm air rises. When warm air rises in your home, it creates a vacuum in the lower areas of the house. Air seeps in from the soil around and under the house and through openings (cracks, doors, windows) on the lower levels to fill the vacuum. Radon gas enters the same way air and other soil gases enter the home through: cracks in the foundation floor or walls, hollow-block walls and openings around floor drains, pipes and sump pumps.

What are the health risks of radon?
Exposure to radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the US. Radon can be inhaled into the lungs where it undergoes radioactive decay. As it decays, radon releases tiny bursts of energy called alpha particles, which can harm sensitive lung tissue and may lead to lung cancer.

How is radon measured?
Radon is measured in picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L), a measurement of radioactivity. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that homes with 4 pCi/L or greater be repaired.

How do I find out if my house has elevated levels of radon?
Radon test kits that meet US EPA guidelines can also be obtained from a radon testing company or purchased from local hardware or home improvement stores. Testing your home is usually simple. Further information is also available by calling 1-800-SOS-RADON.

How can I repair my house if it has elevated levels of radon?
A variety of methods can be used to reduce radon in homes. Sealing cracks and other openings in the foundation is a basic part of most approaches to radon reduction. In most cases, systems with pipes and fans are used to reduce radon. These systems prevent radon gas from entering the home from below the concrete floor and the foundation. Similar systems can be installed in homes with crawl spaces.

The cost of making repairs depends on how your home was built and several other factors. The average cost for a contractor to lower radon levels in a home can range from $500 to about $2,500.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-3771 or visit www.myguilford.com

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