For Immediate Release

New grant allows health department to test child care centers for radon

MORGANTOWN, WV (January 17, 2020) — Now that January is here, it’s a great time to consider having your home or business tested for radon, which can be conducted by Monongalia County Health Department.

Additionally, a new grant will allow MCHD Environmental Health to conduct radon tests in child care centers in Monongalia and Preston counties.

The $18,600 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and administered through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources will cover testing in 30 centers in Monongalia County and six in Preston County.

Registered sanitarian Joe Lawson, a radon measurement specialist, will assess each child care center and suggest a plan to the owners, said Jon W. Welch, MCHD Environmental Health program manager.

“Joe has a form that he created and he will walk through a building and look at criteria such as how many rooms there are, how many children there are and how many rooms are underground,” Welch said.

Radon is an odorless, colorless gas that is the result of radioactive metals breaking down in rocks, soil and groundwater. It can then seep into homes and accumulate. Exposure to radon occurs primarily by inhaling air that comes through cracks and gaps in buildings and homes.

Radon is a natural element from the earth, so exposure to small doses of the gas is constant. Exposure to high levels of radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, after cigarettes.
About 1 in 5 homes in Monongalia County is found to have high levels of radon compared to 1 in 15 nationally, said Lawson, who has been certified as a tester through the National Radon Safety Board. Those figures are provided by the EPA.

Radon is measured in picocuries per liter (PPL) and anything above 4 ppl is considered high.

“Monongalia County is in a region known to have high radon levels,” Lawson said. “That is why it is important to get your home tested for radon. Long-term exposure to radon gas can lead to lung cancer. It’s estimated in the United States that 21,000 people die per year from exposure to radon gas.”

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that all homes in the country get tested for radon. January is National Radon Action Month. The cold weather in winter, when homes are typically more closed up, is an ideal time to have homes tested for radon. It’s also the month to emphasize the EPA’s National Radon Action Plan, which had a goal of reducing radon risk in 5 million U.S. homes by 2020, thereby saving an estimated 3,200 lives.

Owners of homes that have higher levels of radon can undergo mitigation that will reduce the amount of radon that accumulates. The average cost of mitigation is $1,500. New homes can be built to be radon-resistant.

MCHD has five continuous radon monitors. In a typical home test, Lawson will set up a device in a home and allow it to run for 48 hours. It creates a report that Lawson can read and share with the homeowner.

Depending on the size of a child care center, all five continuous radon monitors might be required for the test, Welch said. If there are more than five rooms, Lawson will switch to charcoal canister test kits that are left out for 48 hours and then analyzed at a lab.

Funds from the grant would allow MCHD Environmental Health to provide the testing of child care centers for free. The price of the test for home or business owners is $125 in Monongalia County and $150 in surrounding counties.

For more information about radon or to set up a test, call MCHD Environmental Health at 304-598-5131. You can also find more information and request a test online monchd.org/radon.html.

For more information on MCHD, check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and safety.