RADON Rights, Risks and Remedy for the Home Buyer

This information has been compiled by the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Public Health (DPH) in conjunction with the Delaware Real Estate Commission to comply with Chapter 25, Title 6, Delaware Code §2572A - Radon Testing and Disclosure.

What are my rights regarding radon and purchasing a home? A buyer of a home in Delaware has the right to know if the property has been tested for radon and the results of that testing. This will be provided to you by a home seller on a Radon Testing and Disclosure form. The buyer also has the right to have the property tested for radon prior to settlement. The testing request can be added to an offer to purchase as a radon contingency.

What is radon? Radon is a radioactive gas. It is colorless, odorless, tasteless, and chemically inert. Unless a test is performed, there is no way to determine if and how much radon might be present in a home. It is formed by the natural radioactive decay of uranium in rock, soil, and water. Low levels of uranium occur widely in Earth's crust and can be found in all 50 states. Once produced, radon moves through the ground to the air above.

What health effects are associated with radon exposure? The Surgeon General has warned that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. There is currently no conclusive data on whether children are at greater risk than adults from radon. If you smoke and you are exposed to elevated radon levels, your risk of lung cancer is elevated further.

What is the "acceptable" level of radon in air? Since radon is a known human carcinogen, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that any radon exposure carries some risk. EPA recommends homes be fixed if an occupant's long-term exposure will average 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/l) or higher.

Why should I test my home for radon? Any home could have radon. Nearly one out of every 12 homes in Delaware has a radon level of 4 pCi/L or greater. The chances of elevated radon are greater in the northern half of the state and slightly lower in the southern half. The U.S. average radon-in-air level in single family homes is 1.3 pCi/L. Outdoor air that is drawn into a home can contribute to the indoor radon level. The average outdoor air level is about 0.4 pCi/L and higher in some areas. The way to know if your home, or the home you wish to purchase, has radon is to test.

What can be done to reduce radon in a home? There are several methods that a contractor can use to lower radon levels in your home. In most cases, simple systems using an underground pipe and an exhaust fan are used to reduce radon. Such systems called "sub-slab depressurization" do not require major changes to your home. These systems remove radon gas from below the home and vent it above the roof where it is quickly diluted. Similar systems can also be installed in houses with crawl spaces. Radon contractors use other methods that may also work in your home.

For additional information, visit the following websites:

Delaware Division of Public Health	www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsp/healthyhomesradon.html
Environmental Protection Agency	www.epa.gov/radon/
National Safety Council	www.nsc.org/library/facts/radon/htm
World Health Organization	www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs291/en/
National Cancer Institute	www.cancer.org/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/radon

Or you may contact the Delaware Division of Public Health, Health Systems Protection, Radon Program, located at 417 Federal Street, Dover, DE 19901; phone (302) 744-4546.