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Radon and Lung Cancer Awareness

November is designated as Lung Cancer Awareness month, a global effort to reduce stigma for a disease that affects both smokers and non-smokers and takes more lives annually than breast, prostate, colon and pancreatic cancers – combined. Smoking is the most common cause of lung cancer, but lung cancer can occur in people that have never smoked. Other risk factors including being exposed to secondhand smoke, having a family history of lung cancer, exposure to asbestos, and exposure to radon gas. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), an estimate of 21,000 Americans die from radon-related lung cancer every year.

The leading cause of lung cancer amongst non-smokers is radon exposure. Radon is a clear, odorless, tasteless radioactive gas that is naturally found in the Earth. Radon dissolves in groundwater, and forms pockets under homes and buildings. The primary method of radon exposure is through cracks in home foundations, new or old. In fact, one fifth of all houses in the United States have dangerous levels of radon. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), if you smoke and live in a home with high radon levels, your risk for developing lung cancer significantly increases.

Homes with a radon level over 4 picocuries per liter of air (pCi/l) need to be evaluated by a Certified Radon Mitigator to determine the type of radon reduction system that may need to be installed. “By knowing your homes radon level and reducing it if necessary, you can protect you and your family,” said Paul Pettit, Public Health Director for Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments (GO Health).

Testing for radon is fast and inexpensive, and is the only way to determine the radon levels in your home. GO Health encourages residents to test for radon when buying a home, doing a major renovation, every 2 years if there is a mitigation system installed or every 5 years otherwise. When purchasing a new house, make sure the seller completes a radon test kit and has the results available. If you are building a new

home, make sure to have radon-resistant construction features installed and tested prior to moving in.

You can purchase a short-term radon test kit from your local hardware store or through a radon-testing laboratory. For more information about radon visit, <https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/radiological/radon/radon.htm>. For more information about radon or other GO Health programs and services, visit www.GOHealthNY.org.

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