



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Tests Schools for Radon Gas

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ESSEX – Radon gas was detected at the Summit Street School in Essex in February at levels low enough to require no further action. The school is one of seven statewide that accepted an invitation from the Vermont Department of Health to test for radon during the heating season.

Screening results from the school showed radon levels between 0.1 picoCuries per liter (pCi/L) and 0.5 pCi/L. The Health Department and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have a recommended action level of 4.0 pCi/L.

Based on a national residential radon survey completed in 1991, the average indoor air radon level is about 1.3 picocuries per liter (pCi/L) in the United States. The average outdoor air level is about 0.4 pCi/L.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas that results from the breakdown of uranium in the bedrock. Long-term exposure to too much radon in the air is the second leading cause of lung cancer (after smoking).

“In an effort to ensure safe air quality for all, I immediately volunteered to participate in the free radon testing grant for schools,” Summit Principal Mary Hughes said. “It is important to conduct these assessments every few years to safeguard the health of all.”

The test kits, small plastic vials of charcoal bits that are tested for radon in a laboratory, were placed in 19 classrooms and were largely unnoticed by the students.

Chris Zuidema, an industrial hygienist, places and retrieves the test kits. He also examines general air quality indicators in the school such as temperature, carbon dioxide levels, ventilation, sources of possible contaminants and dust, water leaks and the types of cleaning products being used.

“We test for radon because it is odorless and colorless, but I also look at overall air quality in schools,” Zuidema said. “It is important to listen to people, including the custodians and teachers. If I see a portable air filter, for example, I'd ask if there were concerns about the air quality.”

For more information about radon, radon testing and mitigation – or a free radon test kit for your home – visit the [Health Department website](#).

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