EnviroTrack
Tracking the Environment and Public Health in Your Community
Winter 2025

NATIONAL RADON ACTION MONTH

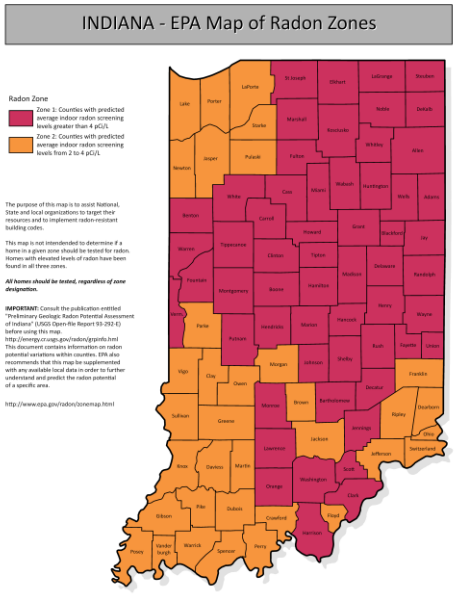
January is National Radon Action Month — a time to protect your home and health by testing and mitigating radon.

What is Radon?

Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that forms naturally from the breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water. It can seep into homes through cracks in foundations, walls, or floors. Because it's invisible and undetectable without testing, radon is often called the "silent danger".

Why Should You Care?

Radon exposure is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, and the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. Radon is responsible for an estimated 21,000 deaths annually. 1 in 15 homes has radon levels above the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recommended action threshold of 4.0 picocuries per liter (pCi/L). The only way to know if your home has elevated radon levels is to test. The EPA recommends action if levels are 4 pCi/L or higher.



How Does Radon Enter Your Home?

- Through cracks in floors and walls.
- Gaps around pipes and drains.
- Crawl spaces and sump pits.

Homes in Indiana often have higher radon concentrations due to soil composition.

Why January Matters

The EPA designates January as National Radon Action Month to encourage families, schools, and businesses to test their indoor air. Winter is an ideal time because homes are sealed against the cold, which can trap radon inside.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Testing: The First Step

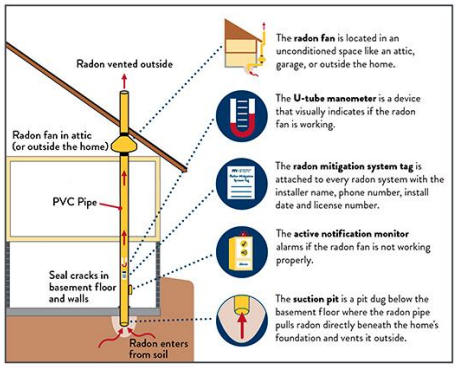
The only way to know if your home has elevated radon is to test.

- DIY test kits are inexpensive and available online or at hardware stores.
- Professional testing offers more precise results, especially for large buildings or schools.

If you live in Marion County, the Marion County Public Health Department will test your home for free. To request a FREE radon test, call 317-221-2266 or go to https://marionhealth.org/radon/

Mitigation: Protecting Your Health

If testing reveals high radon levels, mitigation systems can reduce exposure significantly. Common solutions include:



- Sub-slab depressurization: A vent pipe and fan system draws radon from beneath the foundation and vents it outdoors.
- Sealing cracks and openings in foundations and floors to limit radon entry.
- Crawl Space Solutions: Vapor barriers and ventilation help limit radon infiltration.

Active mitigation systems can reduce radon levels by up to 99%, safeguarding your health.

Benefits of Radon Mitigation

- Health Protection: Reduces lung cancer risk significantly.
- Peace of Mind: Ensures safe indoor air quality.
- Home Value: A mitigation system can be a selling point for buyers.

Most homes can be fixed for a cost similar to other common repairs, and systems require minimal maintenance.

Take Action Today

- Test Your Home.
- If testing reveals high radon level, talk to a Certified Professional to discuss mitigation options. To find an Indiana Certified radon mitigator go to https://mylicense.in.gov/everification/Search.aspx
- Retest After Mitigation: Ensure levels remain safe over time.

COLD WEATHER ILLNESS

Winter weather is here! While snow days can be fun, low temperatures can cause health and safety hazards. **Cold-related illnesses** can occur when your body struggles to maintain its temperature. Although the risk of cold-related illnesses increases with extreme weather, it's possible to experience effects at temperatures as high as 60°F.

Hypothermia. When your body loses heat faster than it can be replaced, hypothermia occurs. This happens during prolonged exposure to cold or cool temperatures.

- **Symptoms:** Shivering, fatigue, confusion, slowed pulse and breathing. Loss of consciousness can happen in severe cases.
- **First Aid:** Seek medical help. Move the victim into a warm location. Remove wet clothes and replace them with dry ones. Keep warm with a blanket. If victim is awake, provide warm, non-alcoholic beverages.
- **Who is at risk:** Infants lose body heat more easily than adults. Older adults are also at higher risk because of slower metabolism. Other high-risk groups include people with chronic diseases, outdoor workers, and people experiencing homelessness.

Frostbite. Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing of the skin and underlying tissue. It most often occurs in extremities and uncovered areas like fingers, toes, ears, cheeks, and chin.

- **Symptoms:** Numbness, tingling, stinging, or aching in affected body parts. Bluish or pale, waxy skin.
- **First Aid**: Get into a warm area as soon as possible; avoid walking on frostbitten feet. Warm the affected area GENTLY (DO NOT rub) by immersing in warm, not hot, water, blankets or clothing, or body heat. Do not use heating pads, heat lamps, heat from stoves, fireplaces, or radiators. The area will be numb and could burn easily.
- **Who is at risk:** People with poor circulation and people who are not dressed appropriately for cold weather.

Trench Foot. Prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions can cause trench foot. Wet feet lose heat 25 times faster than dry feet, so blood vessels constrict to stop circulation. This can cause the tissue in the feet to die.

- **Symptoms:** Reddening of skin, numbness, leg cramps, swelling, blisters or ulcers, bleeding under the skin, gangrene.
- **First Aid:** Seek medical help. Remove shoes and wet socks. Dry feet. Avoid walking.

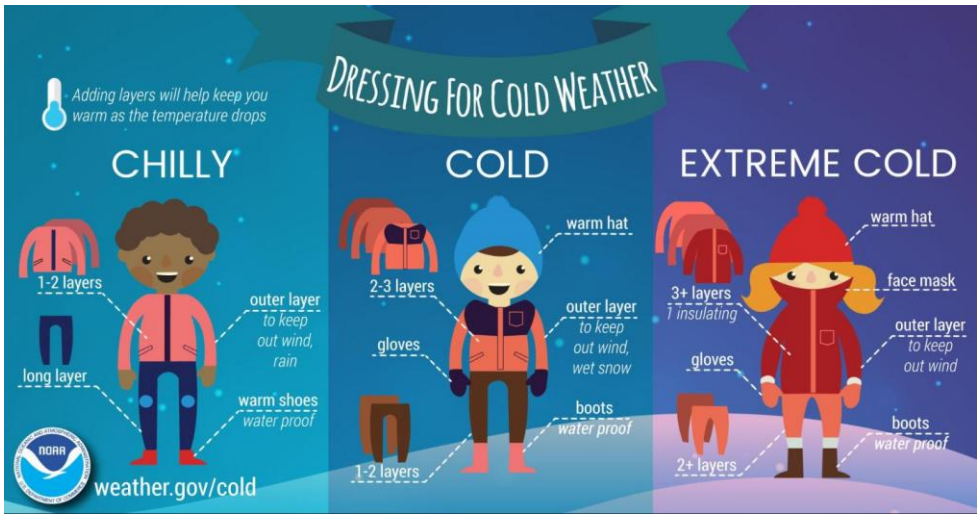
- **Who is at risk:** Anyone with prolonged exposure to cold, wet weather including outdoor workers, hikers, and homeless individuals. Also, people with poor circulation.

Chilblain. Inflammation of small blood vessels in the skin caused by repeated exposure to cold weather. Damage is permanent and redness and itchiness returns with additional exposure.

- **Symptoms:** Redness, itching, blistering, inflammation, ulceration in extreme cases.
- **First Aid:** Avoid scratching. Slowly warm skin. Use corticosteroids. Keep blisters and ulcers clean and covered.
- **Who is at risk:** Anyone with prolonged exposure to cold. Young women, people with a low BMI, smokers and other people with poor circulation are at a higher-than-average risk.

Safety tips.

- **Be weather alert.** Check your weather app regularly to be prepared for severe weather. Remember that higher windchills speed up how fast you lose heat. Visit https://www.weather.gov/safety/cold-wind-chill-chart to learn more.
- **Wear appropriate clothing.** Dress in loose layers. Cotton can hold moisture and make you colder while wool is more insulating. Wear insulated, waterproof boots. Wear a hat and cover your face, ears, hands, and feet.
- **Take breaks**. Take regular breaks in a warm place. Stay hydrated with warm, sweetened drinks. Avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- **Pack an emergency kit.** Have a winter emergency kit for your home and car. See page 7 to learn more.
- **Know the signs**. Keep an eye on your friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers and get help if they are showing signs of cold-related illness.



CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a silent, invisible threat. But with the right precautions, you can protect yourself and your family.

What Is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, and poisonous gas produced when fuels such as gas, oil, wood, or charcoal burn incompletely. Because it cannot be detected by human senses, it's often called the "invisible killer." Exposure can cause sudden illness or even death.

Health Risks and Symptoms

Breathing in carbon monoxide prevents your body from getting the oxygen it needs. Symptoms of CO poisoning often mimic the flu, making them easy to overlook:

- Headache, dizziness, and weakness
- Nausea, vomiting, or upset stomach
- Chest pain and confusion
- In severe cases, loss of consciousness or death

Children, older adults, and people with chronic heart or lung conditions are especially vulnerable.

Common Sources in the Home

Carbon monoxide can build up indoors when fuel-burning appliances or engines are not properly vented or maintained. Key sources include:

- Furnaces, fireplaces, and wood stoves
- Gas ranges and ovens
- Portable generators
- Charcoal grills
- Vehicles running in attached garages

How to Protect Yourself

CO poisoning is preventable. Here are essential steps to safeguard your health:

- Install CO alarms on every level of your home and near sleeping areas. Test them monthly and replace batteries yearly.
- Have heating systems, water heaters, and other fuel-burning appliances serviced annually by qualified technicians.

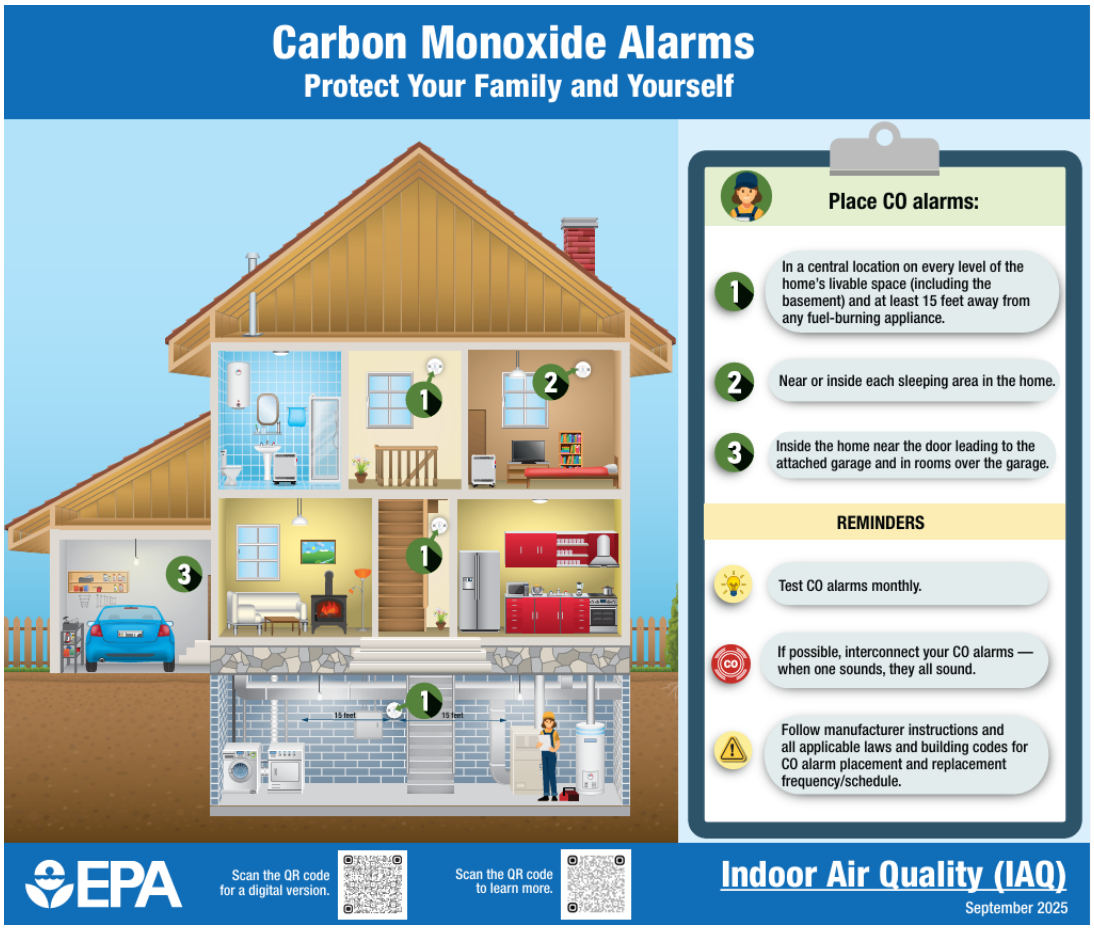
- Never use portable generators, grills, or camp stoves indoors or in enclosed spaces like garages.
- Ensure proper ventilation for appliances and chimneys. Keep vents clear of snow and debris.
- Do not run vehicles inside garages, even with doors open.

Community Awareness

Did you know that more than 150 people in the U.S. die each year from accidental, non-fire-related CO poisoning (Source: Consumer Product Safety Commission). Spread the word with friends, family, and neighbors. Awareness saves lives.

Final Takeaway

Carbon monoxide is dangerous precisely because it's undetectable without alarms. Early detection and prevention are your strongest defenses. By installing alarms, maintaining appliances, and practicing safe habits, you can protect your health and keep your home safe.



WINTER WEATHER EMERGENCY KITS

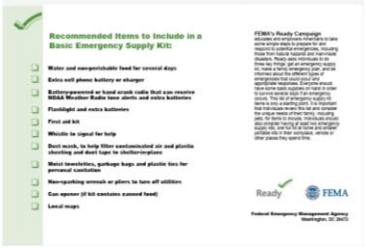
Severe winter weather like snow and ice can cause dangerous road conditions, power outages, and other stressful situations. But you can ease the stress by preparing emergency kits for your home and car.

For Car:

- Water and high-calorie snacks
- Ice scraper, show brush, shovel
- First aid kit
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Extra set of warm clothes, boots, and mittens, and a blanket or sleeping bag for warmth
- Paper map if you are in an area unfamiliar to you (GPS signals may not work)
- Sand or cat litter for traction
- Emergency radio
- Cell phone and power bank
- Keep a full tank of gas

For Home:

When building an emergency kit for your home, remember food, hygeine, and other essentials for your family, including pets. Pack supplies for 3-5 days. If you use a generator, remember to follow manufacturer instructions to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.



- **Food:** Pack enough non-perishable food, like tuna, peanut butter, or snack bars, for at least 3 days. Include baby formula and pet food. Also, any utensils.
- **Water:** 1 gallon per person per day for food and sanitation.
- **Health and Hygiene:** Soap, hand sanitizer, moist towelettes, diapers, feminine hygiene supplies, trash bags and ties. Don't forget any medications.
- **Emergency supplies:** Flashlight with extra batteries, phone chargers/power supplies, emergency radio, first aid kit, a whistle to call for help, extra clothes, and warm bedding.
- **Home supplies:** Have a wrench or pliers handy in case you need to shut off utilities, and plastic sheeting, duct tape, and scissors may be needed if you are sheltering in place.

Visit https://www.ready.gov/kit for information on how to build your kits and checklists.

LITHIUM-ION BATTERY DISPOSAL

What are Lithium-ion batteries? Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries are small, "energy dense" batteries. Products like power tools, toys, laptops, and other electronics sometimes use Li-ion batteries. You might also find them in electric vehicles and E-cigarettes or vape pens. They can be rechargeable or single use.

Why are lithium-ion batteries a hazard? These batteries store a high amount of energy and are more likely to overheat, catch on fire, and can lead to an explosion if not used and stored properly.

Li-ion batteries are also an environmental challenge. When disposed of incorrectly, they can cause fires in landfills and during transport. Electronics containing Li-ion batteries and E-cigarettes can also leak toxic chemicals, including nicotine.

How can I dispose of my lithium-ion batteries and vape products? Li-ion batteries and electronics containing them are hazardous materials. Hazardous materials have different disposal requirements than other waste.

DO NOT dispose of Li-ion products in regular household trash or recycling.

Li-ion batteries must be disposed of at a certified electronics recycler. You can find recyclers at https://www.epa.gov/recycle/used-lithium-ion-batteries.

These items are **NOT** accepted at Indianapolis ToxDrop locations.

Before disposing, you can tape the battery terminals or place them in individual zip-lock bags to reduce fire risk (see images below).

Vape pens are currently **NOT** accepted by any waste disposal site in Marion County. But there are steps you can take to keep yourself and community safe from Li-ion battery-related fires:

- Harm reduction by switching to non-single use products.
- Place the vape in a plastic bag before throwing it away to reduce risk of chemical leakage.
- Cessation. To learn more about quitting, visit Quit Now Indiana. This free service offers counseling, education, and support services. Nicotine replacement therapy is available for those who meet eligibility requirements. Visit QuitNowIndiana.com or call 1-800-QUITNOW.

Learn more about Li-ion battery safety:
National Fire Protection Association

EPA- e-cigarette disposal

IMPORTANT DATES

Observances:

- Radon Action Month (January)
- National Cancer Prevention Month (February)

MCPHD Offices Closed:

- December 23 (noon)-25 (Christmas)
- December 31 (noon)-January 1 (New Year's)
- January 19 (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)
- February 16 (Presidents' Day)

TAG Meetings:

- February 26, 1 pm

LOCAL RESOURCES

- **Indiana 211** offers information on many local resources including warming shelter location info, winter coat programs, and holiday assistance. Visit https://in211.communityos.org/
- **Quit Now Indiana** offers smoking cessation resources to Hoosiers. Visit https://www.quitnowindiana.com/ or call 1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QUITNOW).

TRACKING UPDATES

MCPHD is piloting an Air Monitoring Study! We will be placing air quality monitors that measure particulate matter around West Indianapolis neighborhoods, but we are starting out at our main office located at 3838 N Rural. To check the air quality status, visit The PurpleAir Map.

Marion County Public Health Department
Environmental Tracking

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