

## Radon in Schools Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Q: What is radon?**

**A:** Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that you can't see, smell or taste. Because radon is a gas, it can seep up through the soil and enter buildings, like homes, schools and workplaces. There are high levels of naturally occurring radon in several locations throughout Oregon.

### **Q: How is radon measured?**

**A:** Radon in the air is measured in units of picocuries per liter (pCi/L). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) strongly recommends you take steps to reduce radon if levels are higher than the action level of 4.0 pCi/L. Radon risk reduction in buildings is also known as mitigation. The Scappoose School District will use short-term (2-4 days) and long-term (30-90 days) radon test kits to measure radon levels in schools as per Oregon Health Authority best practices. Initial tests are short-term and are always followed by a second measurement to confirm initial results, unless those results are less than 4.0 pCi/L. These are the same best-practice testing procedures that are used to test a private residence. Radon levels are influenced by a large number of variables that vary from building to building and room to room. Best-practice testing is necessary to clearly identify the need for mitigation.

### **Q: What are the health effects?**

**A:** Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. Breathing radon does not cause any short-term human health symptoms such as shortness of breath, coughing, headaches, or fever. The risk of developing lung cancer increases when an individual breathes air with high levels of radon over a long period of time. The risk also depends on many other factors such as genetic disposition, family history, smoking, presence of other indoor air quality issues (at home, school or work), radon levels, the type and condition of building and ventilation systems, seasonal and weather variations, etc. While radon is proven to cause cancer, not everyone exposed to elevated radon levels will develop lung cancer. For those who do, the onset of lung cancer usually occurs years after exposure. If you live in a home with high radon levels, smoking raises your risk of lung cancer by 10 times. Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. If you are ready to quit smoking and would like help, contact the Oregon Tobacco Quit Line by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW, or visit their website at [www.quitnow.net/oregon](http://www.quitnow.net/oregon).

### **Q: What prompted Scappoose School District to test for radon?**

**A:** Scappoose School District began testing for radon to comply with the state legislation, ORS 332.166-167, mandates radon testing in every public school by January 2021.

### **Q: What is Scappoose School District doing to make sure classrooms are safe and that all buildings are tested and mitigated if needed?**

**A:** The health and safety of Scappoose District students and staff is top priority. Rooms that test equal to or over 4.0 but less than 8.0 will undergo long-term follow-up testing that will be completed before the end of the school year. Long-term testing lasts between 30 to 90 days. Those rooms that initially tested over 8.0 pCi/L and still test above 4.0 pCi/L during follow-up testing are then placed under mitigation. Initial mitigation efforts are typically to ventilate the room(s) by turning on the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) 24/7 to provide more outside air, reducing the radon level. This step is an interim measure to quickly reduce radon levels. Continuous radon monitors (CRM) are used to confirm reduced levels, followed by an investigation of the specific room(s) and building by a radon contractor to design and install permanent mitigation equipment. Additional testing during this process is used to evaluate the impact of the interim and permanent mitigation.

**Q: Should students, staff and visitors be allowed in school buildings with rooms that have high levels of radon?**

**A:** Since radon occurs naturally, a person can never completely get away from it. According to the EPA, radon averages 1.3 pCi/L inside and 0.4 pCi/L outside homes and buildings across the country. The overall goal of radon reduction is risk reduction. So the lower the levels of radon that an individual is exposed to, the better. However radon levels can be influenced by building design, room size, etc. Large buildings, like schools, have many rooms and the radon levels in each room may be different from each other. The focus of radon testing is not on the school building as a whole. Instead, the goal is to understand radon levels in individual, frequently-used rooms in the building where people may spend long periods of time. The EPA recommends school officials consider relocating individuals in rooms that have radon levels near 100 pCi/L. However, it is likely that school officials will evacuate rooms at a much lower level.

Because students and other occupants of school buildings spend much of their time at home, the home may be a significant source of radon exposure. The EPA recommends that all homes AND schools be tested for radon.

**Q: Do children have a greater risk of cancer from radon exposure?**

**A:** Children are usually more sensitive to environmental pollutants. However, no current data concludes that children are more at risk than adults from radon exposure.

**Q: Can my child be tested for radon?**

**A:** There is no medical test for radon. The only way to find out an individual's radon exposure is to test the inside of buildings like homes and schools, where the majority of time is spent. Children spend more than twice as much time at home as they do in school. While school districts are testing the radon levels within their school buildings, parents should also be testing their homes for radon to reduce that potential exposure pathway.

**Q: While my school is performing radon testing and mitigation, what can I do to reduce my or my child's risk?**

**A:** There are many ways to reduce your radon risk:

- Test your home for radon. You can find do-it-yourself (DIY) test kits similar to those being used for testing in schools at a local hardware store. Or you can order one online from the American Lung Association. Information on where to find a test kit is below.
- If high levels are found at school or within your home, encourage local residents to test their homes.
- If you are a smoker, stop smoking. Or at least cease smoking inside of the home. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for help.

**Q: Where can I find the school's radon test results?**

**A:** <https://or02213022.schoolwires.net/domain/29>

**Q: Where can I find a radon test kit?**

**A:** DIY radon test kits can be found at most local hardware stores for around \$10 to \$40 plus shipping and analysis fees. The following resources also offer DIY radon test kits:

- [American Lung Association](#)
- [National Radon Program Services](#)

- **Oregon Radon Awareness Program Radon Risk by Zip Code Map**[radon.program@state.or.us](mailto:radon.program@state.or.us) offers FREE radon test kits to those living in areas where no risk level is assigned on the . Please email to find out if you are eligible.
- The National Radon Proficiency Program has a webpage listing of all approved consumer devices(<http://aarst-nrpp.com/wp/consumer-devices>). Going directly to the labs can be much less expensive.

**Q: Are the test kits safe?**

**A:** Yes. However, kits should be kept away from very young children (toddlers and infants) so they don't eat or chew on them.

**Q: How do I find out radon levels in my rental home?**

**A:** You can ask you landlord if the home has already been tested. If so, request a copy of the test results. If not, you can ask the owner to test or you can test yourself using a DIY test kit (see above Q: Where can I find a radon test kit?). At this time, Oregon does not have any specific radon standards or regulations for rental homes.

**Q: Where can I learn more about radon?**

**A:**

- Oregon Health Authority: [www.healthoregon.org/radon](http://www.healthoregon.org/radon)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): <http://www.epa.gov/radon>
- EPA – Radon in Schools: <http://www.epa.gov/radon-schools>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/radon/>
- National Radon Program Services: <http://www.sosradon.org>; 1-800-SOS-RADON