



Health Committee –Introduced

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Radon Testing Position

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Position Statement:

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation requiring radon testing for all public schools in Iowa.

Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, the voice of Iowa’s youth, that legislation pertaining to mandatory radon testing for all public schools in Iowa be enacted and repeated every ten years. If the results of testing exceed specified levels, then school districts are to perform an additional test within 90 days of the initial test. Failure to pass the second test will require the school district to implement a mitigation plan within one year and provide for additional testing and monitoring following that process.

Rationale

Iowa leads the nation in radon with the highest percentage of properties with radon above the Environmental Protection Agency recommended levels. Every single one of Iowa’s ninety nine counties is flagged as being “Zone 1”, a level that is considered “high risk”. Radon is a colorless, odorless gas that is a leading cause of lung cancer, causing an estimated 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year; 400 of which are from Iowa alone. Radon is highly prevalent in Iowa due to the high levels of uranium in Iowa’s soil. Radon rises from decayed uranium in the soil as a gas and has the capability to enter homes and schools.

Iowans take great pride in their public schools, and the government has an obligation to ensure the safety and productivity of their learning environment. In order to fulfill this obligation the state must provide for radon testing in all of Iowa’s schools, which have empirically become hotbeds for radon infestation.

According to an Iowa Department of Education survey, only 18 percent of districts tested for radon gas and 59 percent said they would not test unless it was a requirement, showing that despite the hazardous detriments of radon, many schools will not test for it unless the testing is mandated.

Costs

The Department of Public Health (DPH) issues radon measurement certifications and charges on average \$700 per certification. The DPH will deposit these funds into the General Fund as they estimate this measure will increase certifications and will require the DPH to hire a FTE to manage the additional testing. This position would be funded by the increase in revenues from the certifications issued and would generate income of an estimated \$160,000 annually to pay for the additional hire.

Under this proposed legislation, public school districts will be required to test classrooms within each school building. Tests would be administered by trained professionals and would cost an estimated \$2,025-\$5,500 per building according to the EPA.

Buildings that show dangerous radon levels must be mitigated by venting the gas from beneath the building out of the building thru the HVAC system or up thru the roof. The cost estimate for radon mitigation to the school districts varies and will depend on the number of radon tests that provide positive radon results.

Funding

While there will be costs to the schools, there are also funding sources. Under the proposed legislation, districts will be allowed to use their property plant and equipment levy (PPEL) collections to pay costs associated with the radon mitigation process. Additionally, in some cases, school districts may use funds from their SAVE Fund to pay costs

associated with the radon mitigation process.

Recommended Action

SIYAC strongly supports a mandatory test for radon and mitigation strategies for levels deemed unacceptable. The government has an obligation to the future of our state to do all that is necessary to ensure every child in Iowa is educated in a safe environment.

Sources

Iowa Department of Public Health

Iowa Department of Education

Iowa Association of School Boards

United States Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/tfs/guideg.html#Testing and Mitigation Costs>