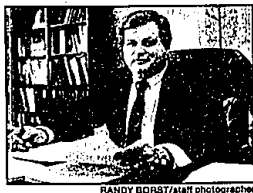


AT RIGHT: Thomas Blasell, Farmington Hills Department of Public Service director.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Radon enters house in Hills

By Joanne Maliszewski

Farmington Hills has not remained untouched by the latest of national environmental scares — radon gas.

But city and state officials are uncertain to what degree radon gas — a gas the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has linked to lung cancer — is a problem in Farmington Hills houses.

"There is radon in Michigan," said Thomas Blasell, Farmington Hills' director of public services. "The degree in Michigan or Farmington Hills is unknown. I can't say that Farmington Hills has a problem any more than I can say that for any other community."

Only one unidentified house in Farmington Hills, out of an unknown number of houses tested in a University of Pittsburgh sampling, showed what's considered a dangerous level of the odorless, colorless gas, Blasell said, referring to the university's study.

The university did not inform or share results with the cities in which the tested houses are located, Blasell said.

BUT MICHIGAN is one of 10 states chosen by the EPA for more extensive radon testing. The Michigan Department of Public Health's radiological division is preparing the six-month program, financed by the EPA. This study is expected to be more uniform in its applications and results because more than likely an area as opposed to a number of houses is expected to be tested, Blasell said.

Robert DeHaan, environmental monitoring chief for the health department's radiological division, was unavailable for comment.

Radon is from radium (a radioactive element found in uranium deposits). The radium decays into radon, which, in turn, seeps into houses through cracks in walls and building foundations, as well sump pumps, Blasell said.

Though houses in Michigan were found to contain radon gas, the greatest concentration was found in houses in the eastern United States, particularly Pennsylvania, according to the university study.

Radon is measured in a special radiation measurement called picocuries. The EPA has recommended a threshold of four picocuries per liter of air per year. "Below that they say there is no (health) problem," Blasell said.

The house in Farmington Hills that was listed as one of 348 considered dangerous in Michigan was found to have four picocuries of radon gas, he added.

ONE HOUSE in the eastern United States was found to have 2,500 picocuries, which is equivalent to smoking 160 packs of cigarettes a day, Blasell said.

The growing controversy over radon gas stemmed from a year-long study by the University of Pittsburgh. The survey is considered non-scientific because it relied on homeowners doing their own radon tests.

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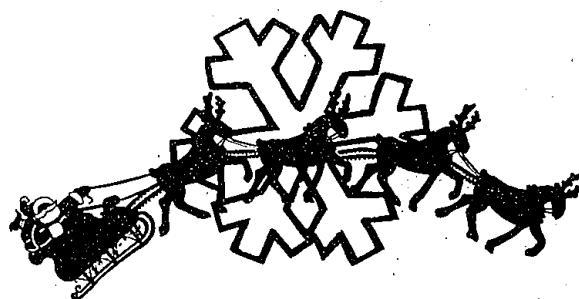


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