

Survey of Radon in Workplaces – Study FAQ

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this survey is to better understand the levels of radon gas in small to medium sized businesses as well as in public workplaces in Ontario. Although some workplaces have been tested for radon in Ontario, they have not been sampled systematically and the results from these efforts are not publicly available. Your participation is important and will help researchers examine where levels are higher and what factors, such as building type and size, influence radon levels in the workplace. This work will also help us better understand how to target radon reduction efforts.

Who is conducting the study?

This survey is being conducted by researchers at the Occupational Cancer Research Centre (www.occupationalcancer.ca), University of Toronto, and Simon Fraser University, as well as staff from the Ontario Lung Association and the Radiation Safety Institute of Canada. The University of Toronto research ethics board has approved this survey.

What does your involvement entail?

Radon is colourless, odourless, and its prevalence varies by location, so testing is the only way to know if radon levels are higher than the guidelines. One or more monitors that measure the level of radon will be placed in your workplace in the winter months. These devices are small (dimensions: 5.1 cm tall x 7.5 cm x 7.5 cm), do not make any noise, and do not require power. The devices are safe and do not emit radiation themselves. They will be left in place for three months. We will collect information on your workplace (e.g. age and size of building, type of heating and ventilation system, building foundation type and condition, address, type of workplace, and number of employees) so that we can analyze what characteristics may influence radon levels in the workplace. After the three month time period, we will collect the device(s).

Participating workplaces should notify their Joint Health and Safety Committees or Health and Safety Representative prior to any testing. Workplaces should also notify all employees about the study to ensure the safety and security of the monitors. We encourage you to recruit a volunteer to safeguard the devices. Although it is not fragile, if the device is tampered with or moved to a different location, the integrity of the results will be compromised. Upon the completion of the study, we encourage you to share the results of the test with your employees. You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, at which point we can collect the monitor. You can decide whether we use the results that are available at the time of collection, or if you would like to be excluded from the study.

What's in it for you?

This study is an opportunity for you to contribute to scientific research in Canada and the furthering of knowledge on radon. If you participate in this study, you will receive free radon testing for your workplace, and we will analyze and interpret the results for you so that you know exactly what the numbers mean. If your workplace has elevated levels, we will share extra resources on how radon levels in buildings can be reduced.

Do you need to obtain permission from your landlord or building management to test the premises?

Generally, tenants do not need to gain permission from the landlord to test the premises for radon. If you decide to test the premise, we recommend that you share the results with all the employees and the landlord, regardless the testing outcome.

What type of information will be published?

Your identity will be protected – information on specific workplaces will not be published. We will only publish high level information (for example, an average for the entire health region). Workplace specific results will only be shared with the identified business contact for the study.

What steps can you take to lower radon levels in your workplace?

Once the results have been analyzed, we will report the study results and your specific results back to you. If your workplace has elevated levels of radon, actions can be taken. Increasing ventilation patterns or rates, sealing cracks and/or sump pumps, or hiring a professional to help with the mitigation can all reduce the amount of radon in your workplace. We will provide materials on radon reduction strategies and what they entail, as well as the contact information for certified mitigation specialists so that you can decide if you want to make any changes.

What are your legal obligations if your workplace has high levels?

The Province of Ontario does not have legislation or regulations in place to regulate exposures to radon in indoor air outside of underground mines. However, under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations, employers are required to provide safe working environments to its employees. For more information on employers' duties and responsibilities regarding radon, please see here: https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/gl_radon.php.

How can you register for the study?

Eligible public workplaces (e.g. municipal buildings, hospitals, and public libraries) must have underground floors, with some workers spending the majority of their time underground. Small to medium sized businesses with fewer than 500 employees are also eligible to participate; those that are located underground will be prioritized, but small to medium sized businesses located on the main (ground) floor of buildings without basements may also be considered. To confirm your eligibility to participate in the study, please contact the study coordinator, Lily Yang (647-952-4379; lily.yang@ontariohealth.ca) or complete the survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/radonatwork>.

Any other questions?

If you have any questions or concerns that you wish to address with someone other than the study coordinator, you may contact the Occupational Cancer Research Centre's general email, ocrc@ontariohealth.ca or you may contact the research ethics manager at the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics (416-946-3273; ethics.review@utoronto.ca).