

Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office

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FISCAL NOTE

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S.279 An act relating to radon testing in schools – As Introduced¹

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/S-0279/S-0279%20As%20Introduced.pdf>

Bill Summary

The bill would require school boards statewide to adopt and implement school radon testing plans whereby schools would periodically test for radon, and if radon is detected, address the presence of the substance. All initial radon testing would need to be completed no later than January 1, 2021 unless a school had been tested on or after January 1, 2017. The radon testing results would have to be made available for public dissemination. The Department of Health would be required create a model radon testing plan for use by school boards and provide educational materials related to elevated concentrations of radon in school facilities. The bill would go into effect on July 1, 2018.

Fiscal Impacts

1. Radon Testing

There are currently approximately 323 public school buildings and a further 124 private schools in Vermont². The Department of Health (Department) currently provides free radon testing kits to schools in Vermont, in addition to providing kits for homeowners, utilizing grant funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Approximately ten schools are currently tested annually by the Department with variances based on the size of schools and whether follow-on action is required after testing. The Department estimates that fewer than 20 schools have been tested since January 1, 2017. Given the numbers above, the total number of schools that would need radon testing prior to 2021 is approximately 430. The Department believes that it could provide testing for an additional 5-10 schools per year if required. Assuming that the Department could test 60 schools over three years at no additional cost to the state or to taxpayers, the remaining 370 schools would need to seek outside professional assistance. The Department estimates that the cost to test a school, on average, would be \$1,450. This cost would vary by the size of the school. If the costs were spread evenly over the next three state fiscal years then the annual testing costs could be as follows:

FY2019 Cost: \$210k Total; \$140k Education Fund and \$70k Private Schools

FY2020 Cost: \$210k Total; \$140k Education Fund and \$70k Private Schools

FY2021 Cost: \$120k Total; \$80k Education Fund and \$40k Private Schools

¹ This fiscal note has been corrected from a previous version, but still pertains to the bill “as introduced.”

² These numbers come from the Agency of Education. For public schools, the number of school principals is used as a proxy for number of school buildings. <http://education.vermont.gov/documents/directory-principals-by-school>
The Agency provides a directory of independent schools in Vermont and this number is also used as a proxy for the number of private school buildings. <http://education.vermont.gov/documents/independent-schools-directory>

2. Radon Mitigation

An estimate for the costs of mitigation statewide is much harder to ascertain with any level of clarity. The Department of Health believes that, based on prior testing results, there may be 35-45 schools in Vermont with elevated levels of radon. When elevated radon levels are detected, the Department estimates that schools would need to spend on average \$1,700 for re-testing and technical assistance before any mitigation work takes place, at a total cost of potentially \$60k-\$80k primarily borne by the education fund. The bill language does not require that schools mitigate elevated radon within a specific timeframe, only that there needs to be a plan in place for addressing elevated concentrations of radon. However, given that testing results would be required to be made public, there would be considerable pressure from the public to remediate as quickly as possible.

Mitigation for elevated levels of radon would typically include drilling a hole in the foundation and installing ventilation to direct the radon away from the building rather than through the floors. The amount of drilling and ventilation required would be dependent on the size of the school, the number of rooms with elevated radon levels and how disbursed those rooms are within the school building. Based on these variables the costs for mitigation, per school, could be anywhere from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. These costs would primarily be pressures to the education fund for public schools, and for private schools the costs would likely be built into tuition rates. Total remediation costs would probably be incurred over the next three to four years as testing takes place.

3. Radon Planning and Education

The Department of Health believes that if its responsibilities per the bill were to create the model radon testing plan and to provide educational information on radon to school boards, then it could do so with its existing staff and resources. However, if the intent would be for the Department to be charged with monitoring, ensuring and reporting on radon testing and remediation compliance, then additional resources would be required.