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## Study: Local environment poor

### Marathon County's radon, Portage County's water quality called health risks

BY AMY OLSON • WAUSAU DAILY HERALD • JULY 8, 2008

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Residents in Wisconsin's rural counties typically live in an environment more conducive to good health than residents of urban areas, according to a new study.

That's not the case, though, for those living in Marathon and Portage counties, which rank near the bottom of the state's 72 counties for physical environment and water quality.

Marathon County ranked last in built environment, which includes factors such as risk of radon exposure and alternatives to driving for transportation, according to findings by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Population Health Sciences.

"The effects of environmental exposures on overall health may not result in poor health outcomes immediately, but may evolve over years or even decades," wrote the authors.

The study is intended to be a progress report showing where counties can improve, said Jessica Athens, a project assistant at the university's Population Health Institute who helped author the report.

Marathon County is a "hot zone" for radon, which has been linked to lung cancer, said Judy Burrows, director of chronic disease prevention for Marathon County. Preventive measures can reduce risk of exposure.

"I think this is research that confirms what residents of this area already knew" about the need for alternatives to transportation, said Burrows, who also works with a committee developing long-range recommendations on multiuse paths.

Having multiuse paths and sidewalks adds to the livability of a community, said Dean Zuleger, village of Weston administrator. The community is undertaking a study to guide long-range planning of paths and sidewalks.

Portage County ranked lowest among the state's 72 counties and the city of Milwaukee for water quality because of its high percentage of wells affected by high nitrate levels.

People who get water from individual wells are at greater risk of contamination than those getting water from municipal water systems, because of frequent inspections and maintenance, Athens said.

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**jambone** wrote:  
 a "hot zone" for radon? now that's comforting  
 7/8/2008 7:40:48 AM

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**swanpuppy** wrote:  
 "The effects of enviromental exposures on overall health MAY NOT result in poor

#### HOW SELECTED COUNTIES FARED

County Air quality Water quality Built environment Physical environment

Langlade 26 48 64 44

Lincoln 39 63 62 63

Marathon 48 54 73\* 68

Portage 42 73 45 71

Shawano 36 56 51 47

Wood 45 62 57 60

Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Population Health Sciences.

\* The city of Milwaukee was included in the study as a separate entity among the state's 72 counties.

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health outcomes immediately, but MAY evolve over years or even decades," wrote the authors. So what the authors are really saying is that they have used hard earned taxpayer dollars, that the state doesn't have, to tell us we live in a filthy, radon filled, cesspool, but they cannot conclude that it has any ill health effects whatsoever. How much is the follow-up study going to cost in hard earned taxpayer dollars, that the state doesn't have, to reaffirm their non-conclusions. I can't wait though, to use those paths to walk the 10 miles to work and back everyday and do my part to help save us all. I feel the livability already. Contrary to this study I for one think that Marathon County and Wisconsin are wonderful places to live, grow, and raise a family, environment and all!

7/8/2008 6:58:07 AM

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