



University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

Impact

Nevada Radon Education Program

The Nevada Radon Education Program is a partnership with the Nevada State Health Division to educate Nevadans about the possible health risk posed by elevated levels of radon in the home. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) offers literature, educational programs and radon test kits in many county Extension offices.

Issue:

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that has no odor, color or taste and is produced by the breakdown of uranium in soil, rock and water. Uranium is found in all soils and in higher concentrations in granite, shale and phosphates. As it decays into radon gas, the radon moves through the soil into the atmosphere, where it is harmlessly dispersed in outdoor air or can enter buildings through foundation openings and become trapped inside. When it enters a building, it can accumulate and present a health concern for occupants. Buildings other than homes can also have radon concerns (such as commercial buildings, schools, apartments, etc.). Radon breaks down into several radioactive elements called radon decay products, which are solid particles that become suspended in air. They are extremely small and easily inhaled, where they can attach to lung tissue. Not everyone exposed to radon will get lung cancer, but the greater the amount of radon and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk of developing lung cancer. Radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking. More than 20,000 Americans die of radon-related lung cancer each year, making it the leading cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers.

What Has Been Done:

Since the fall of 2007, the Nevada Radon Education Program has been actively promoting awareness of the radon health risk to the citizens of Nevada through educational programs, displays, brochures, the Radon in Nevada Web site, www.unce.unr.edu/radon, newspaper press releases, TV reports and literature distribution. Cooperative Extension offices statewide offered free radon test kits for the first two years of the program, and free kits are still available to residents of Clark and Douglas counties. Other offices statewide now charge \$5 per kit.

During January 2009's National Radon Action Month, public programs, as well as community group programs, were offered statewide in attempts to educate the public by direct contact. In the first quarter of 2008, 1,852 short-term radon test kits were distributed by the program. In the first quarter of 2009, more than 6,300 test kits were distributed. In addition, 403 short-term test kits were purchased from other retail sources and used during the quarter.

Since 2007, UNCE's Radon Program has responded to 4,800 phone calls or e-mails; spoken with nearly 17,300 people, and distributed nearly 70,000 publications or information pieces.

Impact:

The number of short-term tests distributed during the fiscal year 2009 more than tripled from the previous year to 10,413 kits. The number of those kits that were used also tripled. The number of long-term tests distributed – which are typically recommended when short-term tests show radon levels above the acceptable standard – went from none in 2008 to 181 in 2009. The number of tests distributed and used have started to reach levels where the results are more statistically significant. For instance, more than 2,300 tests – the highest number of any county in Nevada – have been conducted in Washoe County, and the results indicate that nearly 20 percent of the homes have had radon levels above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Action Level. In Douglas County, nearly 1,300 tests have been conducted and more than 40 percent of the homes have elevated radon levels. Overall, one in four homes in Nevada has elevated radon levels. UNCE provides information to property owners including contact information for certified mitigation professionals and encourages homeowners to mitigate their homes if elevated radon levels are determined.

UNCE also encourages the inclusion of radon-resistant features in new construction. Installing radon-resistant features in new construction is a wise choice, as the cost to install the system is usually a fraction of the cost to fix an existing structure and the results can be more aesthetically pleasing.

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