

# Half of Pershing radon tests at unsafe levels

## State officials urge home radon screening

By Debra Reid

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LOVELOCK — Too easy to ignore, an invisible, potentially deadly gas could be infiltrating more than half of the homes in Lovelock according to state radon officials. The health threat can be eliminated, however, and Lovelock resident Dixie McKay is determined to raise public awareness about the radon problem and solutions.

As the new University of Nevada Cooperative Extension administrative clerk, McKay has been distributing free radon information and test kits. After a recent test revealed a high radon level in her own bedroom, McKay will be stepping up her anti-radon campaign by sharing personal experience.

McKay's first short-term test result of 15 pCi/L (picocuries per liter of air) was well over 4 pCi/L, the maximum radon level considered safe by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. Last weekend, McKay conducted a second radon test in her living room. If the average of the two tests is also high, she and husband Jack said they'll hire a certified radon mitigation contractor to eliminate the hazard.

McKay is urging other residents to test their homes for radon and recommends homeowners who already know they have hazardous radon levels to take action instead of ignoring the problem. She's worried high level radon exposure may have short-term as well as long-term health consequences.

Long-term exposure to high levels of the invisible, odorless gas is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers and causes 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year according to national health offi-

cial. The World Health Organization recommends remediation when radon is at or above 2 pCi/L.

Radon gas is released during the decay of radium that naturally occurs in rock, soil and ground water.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, a 1,000 square-foot house with 4 pCi/L of radon has nearly two million radon atoms releasing radiation each minute as they decay into polonium, also radioactive.

On a state radon map, more than half of Pershing County to the southwest of Rye Patch is painted red with the highest radon potential (20.01 to 100 percent) while the east side of the county is green with zero potential. Increased home radon testing, however, would provide a more detailed and accurate picture of radon levels and health risks across the counties and the state.

In the Lovelock area, more than half of the recent residential radon test results exceeded the safe level according to Susan Howe, University of Nevada radon education program director. There was a total of 25 radon test results from Pershing County reported to her agency in October and November, 2014.

Of the radon test results from Imlay, all three were below the EPA's "action" level of 4 pCi/L. The other 22 test results were from the Lovelock area with 12 of those at or above the safe level with the highest test reading at 21.4 pCi/L. The previous Pershing County radon test high was 25.5 pCi/L, Howe said.

For residents with high short-term radon tests, a second short-term screening is suggested. If the average of the two tests is at 4 pCi/L or above, radon mitigation is recommended. If initial radon levels are between 4 to 8 pCi/L, resi-

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dents should conduct a long term test for 91 days to a year. If average radon levels are high, mitigation is recommended but long-term tests may indicate safe radon levels.

Howe said winter is the best time for a short-term test when radon levels are generally highest. If the short-term test result is below 4 pCi/L in winter, chances of the yearly average being higher are low.

"We recommend testing for the full year through all four seasons as radon levels fluctuate seasonally, monthly, daily and hourly," she said. "The result will be an average of all the radon fluctuations over the entire period producing a more definitive measurement."

Mitigation prevents indoor radon accumulation with an emission system that forces the gas from below the home into the air above. There are contractors in Nevada nationally certified to mitigate radon but some do-it-yourself homeowners choose to install their own radon mitigation systems.

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For short or long-term radon test kits, contact McKay at the local UNCE office at (775) 273-2923.