



Radon awareness program slated for Churchill County

BY MEGAN LONG
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With winter here, it's a good time to test your home for radon.

Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that comes from the decay of uranium in rocks and soil. But how does it get into your home? The radon gas, which emits tiny radioactive particles, can seep up through cracks in solid floors, construction joints, gaps around service pipes and many other conduits into your home. In the colder months, when your home is sealed up tightly, radon levels can rise and become a danger to you and your family.

It is estimated that radon causes about 20,000 lung cancer deaths per year, which is more than drunken driving and home fires combined. It is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers, and if you do smoke, your risk increases. But it is also a preventable risk, and one that your family can easily test for.

IF YOU GO

The University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is offering a radon presentation in Churchill County on Thursday at 6 p.m. at the fairgrounds' multi-purpose building. Attendees will receive a free radon test kit and will learn how to test for radon and how to eliminate it.

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Approximately 12 percent of Churchill County homes have reported elevated levels of radon.

A short-term radon test kit will give you an accurate, easy snapshot of the radon level in your home. These screening kits are put out in your home for about three days, during which time they take an air sample that is sent to a lab for results. The kit includes detailed instructions, the test, a postage-paid mailer and all of the lab fees.

If the short-term test reveals elevated levels of radon, then a second test is recommended to confirm the result. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set an "action level" of 4 picocuries per liter of air and recommends mitigating your home if you find levels in excess of this number.

A certified mitigator can install a radon-reduction system, which is very effective in reducing radon levels in your home.

Radon can be a problem in any type of home, old or new, tightly sealed or drafty, as well as any type of foundation such as a basement, crawl space or slab on grade. Because radon is a gas, any building with contact to the soil (this includes your home, school, office building etc.) is at risk. Of course, not everyone exposed to radon will develop lung cancer, but the higher the level of radon and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk. By conducting a simple test, you can ensure that you and your family are not in jeopardy.

Since September 2007, UNCE — working with the Nevada State Health Division — has distributed more than 16,000 radon test kits. The results of these tests give us a good indication of radon potential throughout Nevada, with some counties showing a high rate of elevated radon — including Pershing County, where 60 percent of the tests conducted showed elevated levels, and Douglas County, where 40 percent of the homes had elevated levels — program officials are encouraging all homeowners have their homes tested.

The data from more than 7,484 tests show that homes in 14 of Nevada's 17 counties have greater than 10

percent probability of having elevated levels of radon, and that 25.6 percent of all homes tested have levels higher than the action level established by the EPA. So what does this mean for you and your family? The only way to know is to test!

To find out how to use a simple radon test, go to UNCE's YouTube Channel and watch the video.

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