

RECORD

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RADON ACTION MONTH

Radon levels a concern for homes in Lincoln County

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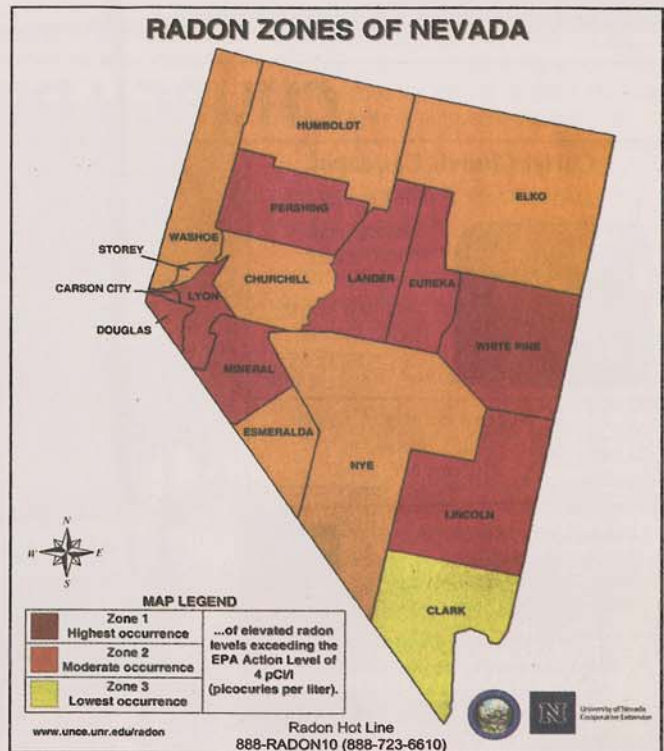
Every January, states across the country reach out to their communities by educating and raising awareness about radon exposure and health risks caused by prolonged exposure to it. January is National Radon Action Month, and Lincoln County Commissioners approved a Proclamation last meeting. Initiative programs and resources are commonly introduced to counties around the state this time of year, however this year, raising awareness about exposure to radon gas isn't just a concern; it's a priority.

Radon is a radioactive, colorless, odorless and tasteless gas that comes from the ground. It accumulates in homes and is the leading cause of lung cancer

in nonsmokers. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates 21,000 Americans die each year from radon-caused lung cancer, killing more people than secondhand smoke, drunk driving, falls in the home, drowning or house fires. According to EPA estimates, one in every 15 homes nationwide have a high radon level at or above the recommended radon action level of 4 picoCuries (pCi/L) per liter of air. Living in a home with an average radon level of 4 pCi/L of air poses as much danger of developing lung cancer as smoking half a pack of cigarettes a day.

Out of the homes that have completed tests, Lincoln County has the second highest average

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A map produced by the UNCE shows Lincoln County homes have one of the highest occurrences of radon in the state.

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radon level in the state, of 6.44 pCi/L, which is 2.44 pCi/L over the EPA action level. Only Pershing County exceeds that average at 6.56 pCi/L. Many of the elevated radon values in Lincoln County are likely due to nearby silicic volcanic rocks or sediments derived from them, mostly due to the relatively high uranium content found in silicic rocks. Test result data collected from the county shows Panaca and Pioche testing higher than the rest of the county. Pioche's average radon level is actually just under recommended action level with a 3.23 average. Out of the 14 valid tests done in Pioche, five of them exceed the action level (highest level was 8). Twenty valid tests have been done in Panaca and 10 of them exceed the recommended action level. One of the homes tested in Panaca came back with a radon level of 121, which is the third highest test result in Nevada to date. Caliente is third on the list with an average radon level of 3.17 pCi/L, however only 18.18 percent of their tests exceeded the action level, compared to Pioche (35.7 percent) and Panaca (50 percent). Seven homes were tested in Alamo and Hiko, all below the action level.

The good news is radon-caused lung cancer is preventable. A three-day test can determine if a house has a radon problem, and winter is an ideal time to

test a home for radon. If radon problems are found, they can be fixed. If the initial test shows a level between 4-8 pCi/L, it is recommended to do a long-term test for a full year, due to climate and home ventilation variables. If the result is less than 4 pCi/L, the risk is low, but remember to test every two years. If the test was done in the summer months, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) recommends you do another test in the winter, during the heating season.

UNCE is leading the way in Nevada by providing resources and support to anyone that needs it. Program Director, Susan Howe, said, "Because testing is the only way to know if your home has a radon problem, and in observance of National Radon Action Month, we offer free radon test kits to Nevada residents from Dec. 1 through Feb. 28." This year, Lincoln County is at the front of the extra awareness push. Only 72 valid tests have been done in county. The percentage of potential radon exposed homes in Lincoln is 32.69% and with only 72 homes tested, a significant number of homes have not been tested, but are potentially exposed to radon gas.

There are a number of resources provided by UNCE office in Caliente located at 360 Lincoln St. For info, call 775-726-3109. Free test kits can be picked up there through Feb. 28. In addition to the office in Caliente, residents can find information at www.RadonNV.com which is UNCE's home site.