

# Residents urged to test for radioactive gas

## Dangers of radon second only to smoking

By Debra Reid

Lovelock Review-Miner

Smoke, dust, mold, gas leaks and carbon monoxide are only a few of the well-known threats to home safety. As if those aren't enough, state officials say Pershing County residents should also be worried about a long-term health risk that's invisible, odorless and otherwise undetectable by the human senses — radon.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the radioactive gas causes an estimated 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year making it second only to smoking and more deadly than second-hand smoke. A by-product of uranium and radium decay in soil and water, the element occurs naturally in low outdoor concentrations but becomes hazardous when it accumulates in homes and other buildings.

Airborne, radioactive radon particles trapped inside the lungs can alter cell DNA and cause cancerous tumors. The EPA considers radon levels above four picocuries per liter (pCi/l) potentially carcinogenic and estimates up to one in 15 homes has unsafe radon levels. The World Health Organization considers two pCi/l the minimum "action level" requiring indoor radon mitigation.

A few county officials and employees attended last week's presentation on the hazards of radon by officials with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

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sion (UNCE) Radon Education Program. Short-term radon tests kits and testing instructions were provided for free to those in attendance.

Although there have only been 113 documented radon tests in Pershing County, 52.21 percent of those tests indicated elevated radon. In the Lovelock area, more than half of the test results were above the safe limit while five tests in Imlay were below the limit. As a result, the UNCE radon website lists Pershing County's radon potential at 55.9 percent, the highest in the state, while the radon potential in Humboldt County is listed as 23.2 percent and Lander County's radon potential in 16.2 percent.

More test results could provide a more accurate picture of Pershing County's actual radon levels.

"Our current statistics are not — See RADON, Page Two —



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Local middle school students entered a state poster contest by illustrating the hazards of radon.