

Radon, a real health threat, can be eliminated

State officials raising awareness during Radon Action Month

By Debra Reid

The Lovelock Review-Miner

LOVELOCK — You can't smell it, see it, taste it, hear it or feel it, but, according to health experts, radon is a very real health threat equal to smoking about half a pack of cigarettes per day.

Over the years, local test results have shown elevated radon levels in 52 percent of Pershing County homes — a higher percentage than any other county in Nevada.

January is Radon Action Month, so once again local residents are being strongly advised by state radon education officials to test their homes for the invisible but dangerous gas. Free short-term radon test kits are available now through Feb. 28 at the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension office in Lovelock.

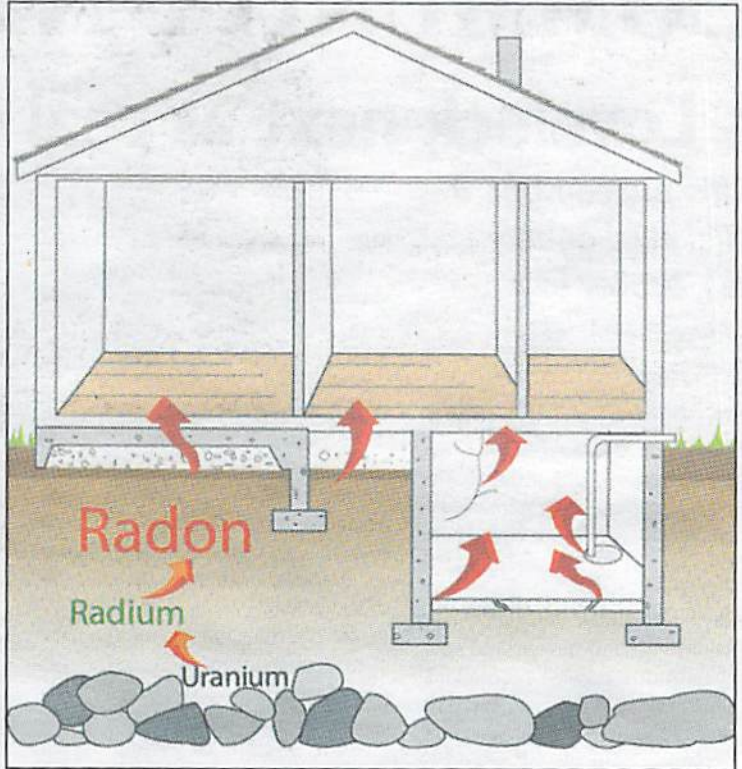
Radon is a natural radioactive gas released from rock and soil by the decay of uranium. Granite, shale and phosphates hold the highest concentrations of uranium. Decaying radon produces radioactive particles that contaminate airborne dust that can be inhaled into lung tissue. As the radioactive particles decay inside the lungs, they emit alpha radiation that ionizes DNA, damages cell genetics and can later lead to lung cancer.

Outside, the odorless substance dissipates to harmless levels but inside buildings it can accumulate to hazardous levels unless mitigation systems are installed. According to the EPA, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers in the U.S.

In 2005, U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona issued a national health advisory warning citizens about radon and the need to test their homes to find out how much radon they and their families are breathing.

"Indoor radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and breathing it over prolonged periods can present a significant health risk," Dr. Carmona said. "It's important to know that this threat is completely preventable. Radon can be detected with a simple test and fixed through well-established venting techniques."

A 2012 radon brochure produced by the Nevada Radon Education Program lists Pershing County with the highest percentage of elevated short-term radon test results in Nevada. Out of 74 home test results recorded in the county from 1989 to Dec. 31, 2011, 41 or



COURTESY OF NEVADA RADON EDUCATION PROGRAM

Radon, a radioactive, carcinogenic gas produced by uranium decay in soil and water, can enter homes through all foundations, including concrete slabs, crawl spaces or basements.

55.41 percent were above the EPA's radon action level of four picocuries per liter (pCi/l) of air.

Eureka County had the next highest percentage with 45.45 percent of homes tested above the radon action level. Clark County had the lowest level at 7.74 percent, according to the NREP.

The EPA's action level is the recommended level at which a home, business, school, government or commercial building should be mitigated to reduce radon exposure.

Elevated short-term test results should be followed up with long-term tests for more accurate measurement of interior radon levels, according to the NREP. In homes and other buildings with radon above the EPA's active level, mitigation systems can eliminate the potential health threat by conducting air from the soil and out of structures. The NREP lists the average cost of a home radon mitigation system at \$3,000.

Radon can enter buildings through crawl spaces, concrete slabs or basement foundations and only three types of homes have no radon problems: mobile homes without skirting, houses on stilts and tree houses, according to the NREP's new page on Facebook.

Last year, about 980 door tag coupons were distributed in Lovelock, Rye Patch, Imlay, Unionville and Grass Valley by Pam Munk and other local volunteers.

"Sadly, only 42 coupons were redeemed for free radon test kits,"

said Susan Howe, program director for the Nevada Radon Education Program. Twenty-one of the test kits were used with 13 in Lovelock, two in Imlay and six in Winnemucca, she said. Seven of the test results revealed radon levels above the EPA action level.

Overall, 50 percent to 60 percent of Pershing County homes tested still have radon results above the action level, Howe said. As of Sept. 30, 2012, 100 homes had been tested, with 52 percent having elevated levels, she said.

This month, Howe and her staff will travel the state to remind Nevadans of the need to test for the gas instead of ignoring the potential threat.

"January is National Radon Action Month so we will be geared up to let more people know about radon," she said. "We will be offering a radon presentation in Lovelock."

Free test kits and additional radon information will be available at a free radon education program on Monday, Jan. 28, at 6 p.m. at the Pershing County Community Center. The UNCE Radon Education Program is working with the Nevada State Health Division and the EPA in a nationwide radon education program.

A new interactive graphic entitled "How Radon Gets Into Homes" can be viewed on the UNCE Radon Education Program website at www.RadonNV.com or look for the program's new Facebook page. The free radon hotline is 1-888-723-6610.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Is Lovelock next as real estate market

'If it's priced right, it sells' in tri-county area, broker says

By Joyce Sheen

The Lovelock Review-Miner

LOVELOCK — Word from Lovelock, on the west side of the tri-county region, is that the area is seeing less growth than Winnemucca, or Battle Mountain, but there are feelings in the community that there is more growth and real estate development on the horizon.

Andrew Benolkin, who has sold real estate in the city of Lovelock and Pershing County for the past 16 years, summed up the situation in his area succinctly: "Demand is up, prices are up, there are no rentals available."

Benolkin added, "There is an undersupply of nice homes; properties are often selling as soon as they get on the market."

He commented that, although prices have risen, some sellers are still not getting the prices they want, and some properties don't sell for replacement value. "But," he noted, "we've faced that situation in Lovelock and Pershing County for a long time."

Benolkin made the general observation that, "northern Nevada does well when the rest of the country is in the hole."

Valerie Santos, who sells for Century 21 real estate in Lovelock and Pershing County, said the movement she sees in the real estate market there is about the same as in previous years, and having enough housing inventory can be a challenge.

She said it is very difficult to get financing for construction in the community.

The concern over financing was also mentioned by an out-of-town builder from Fallon who says he's been working for some time to develop his reputation and opportunities in the Lovelock market.

Arthur Johnson, with Monarch Construction, said he sees a great opportunity in construction and real estate in Lovelock.

"There is a large need; the economy is picking up but there is a real need for financing," he said.

Johnson said lenders appear to be concerned, and appraisers tend to be very conservative, and it's difficult to arrange financing, both for a construction loan, and then to get it rolled over into a mortgage loan. He noted the last two site-built homes he's done in Lovelock

priced \$250,000 and below really doesn't last long. He noted the sales slow when they get into the \$350,000 to \$400,000 range. He also noted that some homes have come down in value

On another front, Johnson said, "commercial values have skyrocketed." He called the increases in those values "significant."

Johnson said that financing still seems to be a struggle in Winnemucca too, and said he feels some of the challenges come from an apparent change in the attitude of the lenders.

He clarified, "It seems like they used to push the envelope a little; if potential buyers were close to qualifying for a loan, the lenders might push it through. It doesn't seem like they do that anymore."

Even so, interest rates are an enormously positive factor for housing sales, according to Harold Hawkins of Vision West Realty. He said, "If you want a house, now is the time! They're giving money away — a 3.5 percent interest rate? It's crazy!"

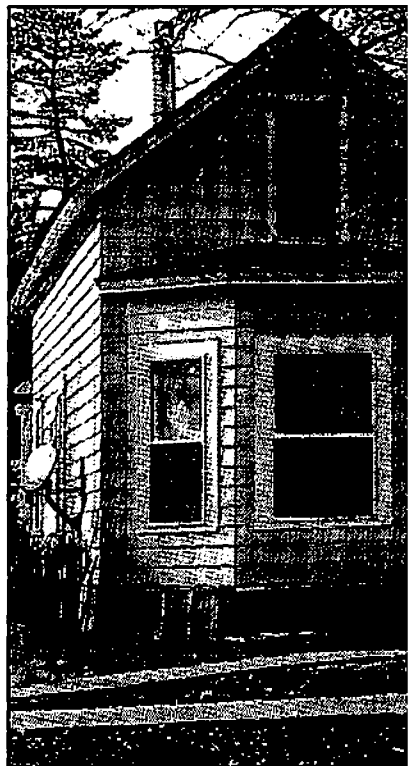
Jeff Johnson put all the current activity into historical perspective, noting that although the Winnemucca/Humboldt County area has definitely had its ups and downs in both the economy and real estate over the last decade or so, "There's no question we have a lot going on right now. The only time I can remember it being busier was the 1998-1999 fiscal year."

Johnson said, of the current workload: "It's good; it's kind of fun, but it's such a challenge to keep up."

As in Lovelock, the price of gold is the main factor that has protected Battle Mountain real estate over the past decade or more. While the real estate market in Winnemucca was called "booming" by several sources, the market in Battle Mountain was termed "brisk" by Battle Mountain brokers Lana Melver and Kim Davis.

Lander County Assessor Lura Duvall said development, land, and home sales and general activity have been steady.

Duvall said some rental development is in the works: one builder has applications in for eight



This older home on Central Avenue is having an adequate inventory of pro

plexes, another has an application in the works for a 12-unit apartment complex, and another development in the very early stages would add 10 four-plexes for a total of 40 new rentals.

"That one is in the very early, tentative, maybe stage," she said.

Even if all three of these rental developments go through, Duvall said it won't fill the need for rentals in the Battle Mountain area.

She said, "I've been here for 32 years and there have never been enough rentals here."

Duvall said some investors are purchasing lower-priced homes as rental property.

The Battle Mountain community and Lander County Commissioners are open to development, according to Duvall, who said her office and the commissioners have met with developers to discuss cooperative infrastructure projects, and have done what they could to encourage builders to work in the community.

"It's only been about the last two years that we've had site-built home-building going on; when the rest of the state was doing well, you

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