

Lovelock Review-Miner

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Half of local radon tests at unsafe levels

State officials urge home radon screening

By Debra Reid

Lovelock Review-Miner

revealed a high radon level in her own bedroom, McKay will be stepping up her anti-radon campaign by sharing personal experience.

— See RADON, Page Two —

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 local 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



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After an indoor radon test showed nearly four times the safe level, Pershing County resident Dixie McKay and her husband Jack will mitigate the hazard if a second test confirms the earlier results.

RADON

(Cont. from Page One)

"I was very surprised the radon test was that high," she said last week. "What I'm going to do when I get home is go to my neighbors and say this is what happened with me and I think it would be to your benefit to go ahead with a radon test. The radon tests are free right now until the end February."

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.

"Other people have had their homes tested and some places are pretty high but they didn't want to deal with it," she explained. "There's a lot of cancer in this valley and what happens if people already have a lung problem like emphysema or pulmonary fibrosis or something? Is radon going to make it worse?"

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 officials. 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. Geolog-

ical 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.

"As of Sept. 30, 2014, Lovelock's overall percentage of valid test results (at or above the safe level) is now at 54.6 percent," she said last week. "These new test results have not been added into this figure as we compile (data) by quarters. The latest results will be included in the Dec. 31 quarter's results."

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, res-



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Last weekend, Dixie McKay placed a second short-term radon test kit in her living room after the first three-day screening indicated a high radon gas level of 15 pCi/L (picocuries per liter) in her bedroom.

idents 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.

Last week, McKay described the simple process of screening her home a second time for radon and said a radon mitigation system will be worth the cost if it makes her home safer to live in.

"I'm going to take a short-time test home tonight, start it in the morning then pop it in the mail box on the way to work Monday morning," she said. "Cancer has no remorse. What if we can lessen the risk?"

The UNCE is offering two upcoming radon information sessions on Jan. 12 at 6 p. m. in the Pershing County Community Center and Jan. 26 at 7 p. m. in the Grass Valley Community Center.

For short or long-term radon test kits, contact McKay at the local UNCE office at (775) 273-2923. For general radon information, go to the UNCE state radon education website at www.RadonNV.com.