

Winter is the time to test for radon

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Elevated levels of radon have been found in 37 percent of the Carson City homes that have been tested, said Susan Howe, program director for the Nevada Radon Education Program through the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

Howe was in Carson City this past week to request that the board of supervisors declare January National Radon Action Month.

Howe said that the radon percentage is even higher — 56 percent — in the 89703 zip code, and nearly 43 percent in the 89702 area. In the 89706 neighborhoods, which include a portion of Lyon County, the percentage was nearly 22 percent, and in 89701, it was more than 26 percent. In 89705, which is mostly Douglas County, it was nearly 20 percent.

Radon levels are measured in picoCuries per liter, or pCi/L. Most households testing positive in Carson City were in the 0-20 range, some were up to 50, but one home in the 89701 zip code area measured levels of over 100.

“Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for nonsmokers in the United States and the second leading cause, after smoking, for smokers,” Howe said.

According to Howe, radon is a radioactive, colorless, odorless and tasteless gas that occurs naturally in most rocks and soils. It is produced by the breakdown of uranium in soil or rocks such as granite, and water.

It is harmlessly dispersed in outdoor air, but when trapped inside structures, it can build up, increasing the chance of lung cancer. The Environmental Protection Agency recommends that people take action to reduce radon levels that are 4 or higher.

“Radon levels fluctuate by season or by the day, but the three-day screening snapshot is recommended during the winter since windows are usually closed up more often,” she said.

Test results will range from: no problem to possible problem to serious problem, she said, and experts recommend that if levels are elevated, property owners should re-test to confirm the results, and then, if needed, invest in a \$15 long-term test kit for more conclusive results.

If the radon gas problem needs to be corrected, there are generally two methods: one for a slab foundation, which costs around \$1,500, and another for homes with crawl spaces, which could cost around \$3,000.

There are only two certified radon mitigators in Nevada right now, she said. One is in Gardnerville, and another in Reno. Another one, who will soon be certified, is from Minden.

The EPA also recommends re-testing every two years or after an earthquake or home remodeling since new gas escape routes can be opened in the ground.

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