

MASTER GARDENER

Stopping the silent killer — radon

By Susan Howe

A silent killer may be lurking in your home. The killer is radon, a radioactive gas that is colorless, odorless and tasteless, that comes



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from the ground and accumulates in homes and buildings.

We know statistics can be boring, but these statistics are too deadly to ignore. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates 21,000 Americans die each year from radon-induced lung cancer.

When compared with other common causes of death, EPA statistics indicate that radon kills more people each year than secondhand smoke, drunken driving, falls in the home, drowning or house fires.

Radon may be in your home, as it is a prevalent problem in Nevada. Statewide test results show that one in four homes has a radon level at or above the EPA Action Level of 4 picocuries per liter of air (pCi/l). Homes that test below 4 pCi/l aren't 100 percent safe from the health risk either, because according to experts, living in a home with an average radon level of 4 pCi/l poses a risk of developing lung cancer similar to smoking half a pack of cigarettes a day.

In Washoe County, 21 percent of the homes tested have radon levels at or above 4 pCi/l; Carson City has 38.6 percent, Douglas County, 39.7 percent and Lyon County, 28.8 percent.

This gas gets into homes because the lower internal pressure, especially in the winter heating months, causes houses to suck radon out of the ground. Radon can then accumulate to dangerous levels.

The only way to know if your home has elevated levels of radon is to test. Testing is easy, and once radon is detected, there are fairly easy, inexpensive ways to reduce exposure to safer levels, thereby reducing the risk of lung cancer caused by radon.

January is National Radon Action Month, and to better help communities comprehend the dangers of radon, the Nevada Radon Education Program will offer presentations.

Free test kits will be available. Presentations in Washoe, Carson City and Douglas counties are:

» Jan. 7: Spanish Springs Library, 7100A Pyramid Lake Highway, Reno, at 6 p.m.

» Jan. 8: Northwest Reno Library, 2325 Robb Drive, Reno, at 5 p.m.

» Jan. 9: Sierra View Library, 4001 S. Virginia St., Reno, at 3:30 p.m.

» Jan. 11: North Valleys Library, 1075 N. Hills Blvd. #340, Reno, at 11 a.m.

» Jan. 22: South Valleys Library, 15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno, at 6 p.m.

» Jan. 27: Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 128 Market St., Stateline, at 6 p.m.

» Jan. 28: UC Davis/Tahoe Environmental Research Center, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village, at 6 p.m. (reception at 5:30 p.m.)

» Jan. 29: CIVIC Hall, 1604 Esmeralda Ave., Minden, at 6 p.m.

» Jan. 30: Carson City Sheriff's Office, 911 E. Musser St., Carson City, at 6 p.m.

Complete presentation list: www.RadonNV.com.

Free radon test kits are available now through Feb. 28 at University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and partner offices statewide. You can't beat free, so Nevadans are encouraged to take advantage of this offer to test their homes for this dangerous gas. In Reno, visit Cooperative Extension at 4955 Energy Way; in Carson City, 2621 Northgate Lane, Suite 15, and in Gardnerville, 1329 Waterloo Lane, or go to www.RadonNV.com, or call 888-RADON10 (888-723-6610).

— Susan Howe is Radon Education Program Director for the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension