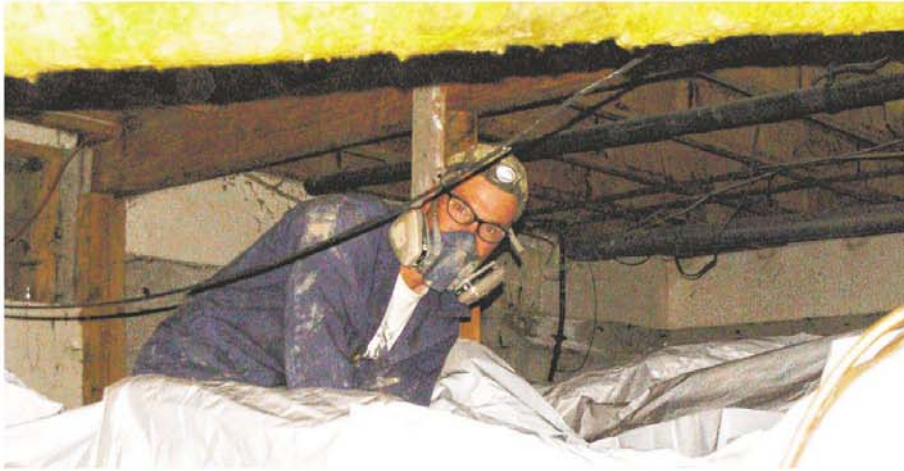


NORTHERN NEVADA

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RADON

THE SILENT KILLER



Eric Class, assisting certified mitigator Derrick Carpenter, lays poly sheeting in a crawl space. SUSAN HOWE/NEVADA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Prevent this common health risk with easy, free testing

By Susan Howe
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers, and unless you test for radon, you will never know if your home harbors the silent but deadly gas. Radon is colorless, odorless and tasteless, and the only way to determine a home's radon level is to test.

Testing is simple and easy, and the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension's Radon Education Program is offering free radon test kits now through Feb. 28 at Cooperative Extension offices around the state, as well as several partner locations. For a complete list of locations, visit www.radonnv.com.

Radon emanates from decaying uranium in soil, rock and water. As uranium decays into radon gas, the gas moves through the soil into the atmosphere, where it is harmlessly dispersed in outdoor air. If a home is near or above a uranium source, radon can enter homes through foundation cracks or plumbing and utility openings and become trapped inside. When it enters a home, it can accumulate and present a health risk.

Radon can enter any home — old, new, well-sealed or drafty. Any building with contact to the ground has the potential for having a radon problem. That includes homes with crawl space, slab on grade or basement foundations, as well as manufactured homes on slab or with skirting. The only way to know a building's radon

2013 NATIONAL RADON ACTION MONTH PRESENTATIONS

- » **6 p.m. Jan. 7:** Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 128 Market St., Stateline
- » **7 p.m. Jan. 8:** Carson City Senior Center, 901 Beverly Drive, Carson City
- » **6 p.m. Jan. 9:** Carson Valley Improvement Club Hall, 1604 Esmeralda Ave., Minden
- » **6:30 p.m. Jan. 10:** Incline Village Library, 845 Alder Ave., Incline Village
- » **Noon Jan. 26:** North Valleys Library, 1075 North Hills Blvd. No. 340, Reno
- » **6:30 p.m. Jan. 29:** Churchill County Fairgrounds, multipurpose building, 225 Sheckler Road, Fallon
- » **6 p.m. Jan. 30:** South Valleys Library, 15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno
- » **5:30 p.m. Jan. 31:** Lyon County UNCE, 504 S. Main St., Yerington

level is to test. If high levels of radon are found, there is a way to reduce or mitigate radon levels.

Radon is responsible for about 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year. About 2,900 of these deaths occur among people who have never smoked. A smoker who is exposed to radon has a much higher risk of lung cancer.

Not everyone exposed to radon will get lung cancer, but the greater the amount of radon and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk of developing lung cancer. The EPA recommends fixing a home if radon levels are 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/l) of air or above, where a picocurie is a measurement of how much radioactivity is present in one liter of air. According to experts, living in a home with an average radon level of 4 pCi/l poses a similar risk of developing lung cancer to smok-

ing half a pack of cigarettes a day. Thus, 4 pCi/l is not a safe level of radon, but it is a level where action should be taken to reduce the radon level in a home, school or building structure.

Although elevated radon levels have been found in one out of four homes tested in Nevada, the risk of radon-induced lung cancer is preventable. Houses and buildings with elevated levels of radon can be fixed or mitigated by installing a radon system, and, when installed properly, will reduce radon levels to below 2 pCi/l, and usually below 1 pCi/l. Depending upon the building's foundation, a venting system is placed in the foundation to exhaust the soil gases and radon from beneath the house, and routed out and away from the home so that the radon gas does not even enter the home. The cost is similar to a minor home repair and depends upon the

type of foundation. In Northern Nevada, crawl space mitigations average \$3,000 and basement or slab foundation mitigations average \$1,500. A slab or basement radon mitigation can be completed within a day, but a crawl space system could take several days. If your home needs mitigation, hiring a certified radon mitigator who is also a Nevada licensed contractor will offer protection that the job will be done correctly.

Deciding whether to mitigate or not is a personal choice that must be made by each homeowner, as there are no laws or regulations concerning the requirement for homes to be mitigated. Although finances play a big part in the determination, the present health of family members, their age and the home's radon level also are important. A question that could be harder to determine is how many more years will your family live in the home, tempered by the knowledge of how long the family already has lived in the home. However these factors play in the decision-making process, the bottom line is this: Preventing lung cancer is far more cost effective and far more logical than the cost of, or the treatment of, lung cancer.

To find out more about radon, its health risk, how to test for it and how to fix radon problems, attend one of NREP's radon education programs being offered in various locations throughout the state during January. To find programs, visit www.radonnv.com or call 1-888-723-6610.

Susan H. Howe is the program director for Nevada Radon Education.