

LOCAL LIFE

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MASTER GARDENER

Deadly radon present in many homes, buildings

By Susan Howe

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Most people associate lung cancer with smoking, but your home, school or office building could be harboring a radioactive gas that can also cause lung cancer.

Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas, comes from the decay of uranium in rock and soil, and is present in elevated concentrations in many homes and buildings. It can enter any building that has contact with the ground and can accumulate to dangerous levels, posing a health risk. Yet, few people know about radon or have tested for it.

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 deadly gas. Radon is colorless, odorless and tasteless, and the only way to determine a building's radon level is to test.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates 21,000 Americans die each year from lung cancer caused by indoor radon exposure, more people than are killed by secondhand smoke, drunk driving, falls in the home, drowning or fires in the home.

The risk of radon-induced lung cancer is highly preventable. If high levels of radon are found, there is a way to reduce or mitigate them.

The EPA recommends homes be mitigated if radon levels are at or above 4 picoCuries per liter of air. A homeowner can conduct the simple three-day test to determine a building's radon levels, and

winter is an ideal time to test a home for radon. When a home is closed up during cooler weather months, radon concentrations typically increase. If the radon test results are low in the winter, chances are there is no problem.

In Washoe County, with more than 4,000 valid home tests conducted, 798 homes — 19.5 percent — tested at or above the EPA Action Level of 4 pCi/l. You can't predict which homes will have high radon levels, as two neighboring homes can have very different levels.

Since January is National Radon Action Month, the Nevada Radon Education Program of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is offering radon presentations and free radon kits, regularly \$5. Radon test kits are available in Reno at the Washoe County UNCE office, 4955 Energy Way, Monday through Friday, from

8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Scheduled radon program presentations in the Reno area are:

» 6:30 p.m., Jan. 10, Spanish Springs Library, 7100A Pyramid Highway, Sparks.

» 6:30 p.m., Jan. 18, Incline Village Library, 845 Alder Ave., Incline Village.

» 11 a.m., Jan. 22, Downtown Reno Library, 301 S. Center St.

» 5:30 p.m., Jan. 24, North Valleys Library, 1075 North Hills Blvd.

» 6 p.m., Jan. 25, South Valleys Library, 15650A Wedge Parkway.

For more information on other radon program presentations and locations to get test kits, visit the Nevada Radon Education Program website, www.RadonNV.com, or call the Radon Hotline, 888-723-6610.

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



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