

NORTHERN NEVADA

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MASTER GARDENER

Test home for radon

By Susan Howe

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Exposure to radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for nonsmokers. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates radon causes 21,000

lung cancer deaths each year in the United States, killing more people than secondhand smoke, drunken

driving, drowning or home fires. Since prevention is the best way to reduce the risk of radon-induced lung cancer, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension's Nevada Radon Education Program encourages testing your home, and then fixing the problem with remediation methods if a radon problem exists.

Cooperative Extension's radon program, funded through the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health, has distributed 29,800 radon tests for Nevada residences since 2007. Results from 14,418 homes tested indicate that one in four homes had radon levels at 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/l) of air or above, which experts say poses a similar risk of developing lung cancer to smoking half a pack of cigarettes a day. The EPA recommends fixing a home if radon levels are at 4 pCi/l or above.

By county, the following percentages of homes tested had elevated radon levels:

- » **Washoe County:** 21 percent
- » **Carson City:** 38 percent
- » **Douglas County:** 40 percent
- » **Lyon County:** 28 percent
- » **Pershing County:** 53 percent

Reno resident Jim McCauley took steps to reduce his risk of lung cancer by mitigating his home after he received a free radon test kit from Cooperative Extension in 2010 that found levels above the EPA action level of 4 pCi/l. He retested his home several times, and the results warranted that he mitigate his home.

"Like most homeowners, you have projects, you have a budget," McCauley said. "And you ask, should I remodel the kitchen or should I do radon remediation? I can tell you, do the radon remediation because an obsolete kitchen is not going to create a situation where you can have a fatal case of lung cancer."

Not everyone exposed to radon will get lung cancer. Lung cancer risk is dependent upon the time exposed and the amount of radon to which one is exposed.

Radon emanates from decaying uranium in soil, rock and water. Any building with contact to the ground can have a radon problem. This includes homes with crawl space, slab or basement foundations, as well as manufactured homes on slab or with skirting. The only way to know a building's radon level is to test it.

Mitigation costs are usually relatively inexpensive, generally costing from \$2,000 to \$5,000. The cost of mitigation is obviously far less than the cost of treating lung cancer. If your home needs mitigation, it is best to hire a certified radon mitigator who is a Nevada licensed contractor to ensure proper mitigation.

Nevadans can purchase a short-term radon test kit at Cooperative Extension offices and partner locations across the state for \$6.25. In addition, test kits will be offered free from Dec. 1 through Feb. 28 to commemorate National Radon Action Month, which is in January. For a complete list of locations or more information, visit www.radonnv.com or call the Radon Hotline at 1-888-RADON10.

Susan Howe is the radon education program director for University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.