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# Something in the air

## Testing for radon in your home is fast and free

By [Kat Kerlin](#)

**Radon is one of those reminders** that just because it's natural, doesn't mean it's good for you. A decay product of uranium, you can't smell, taste, or see radon, but it can be deadly stuff. In non-smokers, this radioactive gas is the leading cause of lung cancer.

January is National Radon Action Month, so University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) is holding a series of presentations throughout the month and providing free test kits to determine the radon levels in residents' homes.

"It's not a question of is there radon in your home, but how much radon," says Susan Howe, UNCE Nevada Radon Education Program director.

Radon, a carcinogen, can enter any home that touches the ground, as well as mobile homes, by seeping through cracks in concrete and around pipes. Though always present in the atmosphere, radon can be harmful when trapped inside poorly ventilated buildings. The Environmental Protection Agency considers 4 picocuries or above as an "action level," or potentially harmful. In Washoe County, 19.8 percent of homes tested had high levels of radon, with the average amount being 3.28 picocuries. The highest level reported was 155 picocuries.

To find out the levels in your home, the free test kits are small and simple. They feature activated charcoal that is to be laid out, undisturbed, for three days as it samples the air.



From left, Megan Long and Susan Howe of the Nevada Radon Education Program at Cooperative Extension hold home radon test kits offered for free this month.

Photo By kat kerlin

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is holding radon presentations and providing free test kits throughout January, National Radon Action Month: Jan 13, 6 p.m., Incline Village Library; Jan. 18, 5 p.m., Sparks Library; Jan. 19, 6:30 p.m., Spanish Springs Library; Jan. 25, 4 p.m., Sierra View Library; Jan. 26, 6 p.m., Northwest Library; Jan. 29, 1:30 p.m., South Valleys Library. For addresses and details, call (888) 723-6610, or visit [www.radonnv.com](http://www.radonnv.com).

“One of the most important aspects is a closed house,” says Megan Long, radon education coordinator. “Close the windows; no kitchen or bathroom fans.” The less ventilation or drafts, the more a worse-case scenario reading of the home radon test can be provided. That’s also why testing is recommended in the winter rather than the summer.

After the three days, residents send the test to a lab in a pre-paid, pre-addressed mailer. Results should be available in a week and a half.

If the results are 4 picocuries or above, Howe recommends taking a second test to confirm.

“The EPA action level is based on your year-round average, and we’re just doing a three-day snapshot of your home,” says Howe.

A year-long test may be taken to get an annual average before deciding to fix what can be an expensive problem. Mitigation involves hiring one of three certified radon mitigators in the state to install a pipe system with an attached fan that sucks in the radon from under the home and vents it out. This can cost between \$800 and \$3,000—the average cost is \$1,500—depending on the home’s construction and other factors. (Homes measuring 4 picocuries or above between now and Feb. 28 will be entered to win a \$1,500 credit through Cooperative Extension toward radon mitigation.)

If you’re buying a home, ask for a radon test to be conducted along with the other housing inspection measures. For sellers, a low radon test could be a selling point of the home.

“These tests are really screening tests,” says Howe. “They’ll tell you if you don’t have a problem, have a possible problem or have a real problem. If it’s below 4, you probably don’t need to do anything.”