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## Radon should be on radar

by Jessica Carner

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*Tribune/Jessica Carner - Sparks resident Roger Slugg hands out a radon testing kit Friday at University of Nevada Cooperative Extension's Washoe County office. Slugg is part of the Sanford Center for Aging's Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). RSVP volunteers help hand out testing kits and information each year during January, which is National Radon Action Month.*

**SPARKS** — Which is responsible for more deaths in the United States: drunk driving or radon gas?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, drunk driving causes more than 17,000 deaths per year, but radon gas is the cause of 21,000 deaths each year in the U.S.

Radon is a naturally occurring colorless, odorless and tasteless radioactive gas released in rock, soil and water from the decay of uranium in the ground. While the gas poses a low health threat outdoors, it can reach fatal levels when it accumulates in buildings.

"Uranium is all around us in the ground," said Susan Howe, program director of the Nevada Radon Education Program at University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. "Uranium decays into radon gas and comes up through the soil."

Howe said radon is harmlessly disbursed in outdoor air, but problems can occur when a building is sitting on top of an area where the gas is coming up through the ground. If the gas begins seeping into the building through cracks or plumbing fixtures, it can build up and put the occupants of the building at a greater risk for developing lung cancer.

The EPA estimates radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers, causing almost 3,000 deaths per year. Overall, radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer, according to the EPA.

The leading cause of lung cancer is smoking, which claims an estimated 160,000 lives each year. Smokers who are exposed to radon are at very high risk for lung cancer, Howe said.

"When smokers are exposed (to radon) their risk is multiplied," she said. "Radon is a Class A carcinogen, the same as tobacco smoke and asbestos."

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension has free radon testing kits available at its Washoe County office, located at 5305 Mill St. Kits, and at various locations across the state. For a full list of test kits distributors, visit [www.unce.unr.edu](http://www.unce.unr.edu).

Throughout January, UNCE is holding informational sessions about radon at local libraries and community centers. The next presentation will take place at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the Sparks Library. To view the full presentation schedule, visit

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Attendees of the presentations will receive a free radon test kit, learn how to test for radon, hear from a certified radon mitigator and be entered into a contest to win a \$1,500 credit toward a radon mitigation system.

Radon has been detected at elevated levels in nearly 20 percent of homes in Washoe County that were tested, but the health risks associated with exposure to the gas are preventable.

Currently, there are three certified radon mitigation providers in northern Nevada: Derrick Carpenter of Dependable Home Solutions in Gardnerville, Norman Denny of Pinnacle Construction Services Inc. and Alan Bennett of Sierra Radon Services LLC.

Carpenter said mitigation services range in price from \$1,000 to \$4,500, depending upon the foundation of the house.

Mitigation in homes with a concrete slab foundation or basement generally ranges in price from \$1,000 to \$2,000, but homes with a crawl space cost more to mitigate because sheeting must be placed on the ground to keep the gas from seeping into the home.

To keep the gas from entering a home, a hole is cut in the concrete slab, basement floor or ground in a crawl space and a pipe is placed in the hole. That pipe is attached to an outdoor unit with a fan that sucks the radon gas out of the ground and pipes it out into the atmosphere, where it will dissipate quickly.

"We basically remove the radon from the soil before it goes into the house," Carpenter said. "The gas will always be coming in, but the system will suck it out."

Carpenter said the mitigation system is permanently installed in the home and requires little maintenance on the part of the homeowner.

"It's worth (the cost), he said. "The nice thing about the system is it runs forever. Eventually the fan will run out, but that is the only thing that has to be maintained."

Radon can enter any home, old or new, Howe said.

"The only way to find out if you have radon gas is to test for it," Howe said.

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