



January is National Radon Action Month

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RENO, Nev. -- It has no smell or taste and you can't see it, but this gas can accumulate to harmful levels when trapped indoors. If you haven't tested your home for it, you could be exposing your family to a known carcinogen that can cause lung cancer over time.

Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas, is present in elevated concentrations in many homes and buildings, and is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. Radon-induced lung cancer kills more people than secondhand smoke, drunken driving, falls in the home, drowning or home fires.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates 21,000 Americans die each year from lung cancer caused by indoor radon exposure. The American Lung Association, American Medical Association, American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control, National Cancer Institute, and the World Health Organization all recognize radon as a serious national health problem.

In efforts to educate people about indoor radon exposure, the EPA has proclaimed January as National Radon Action Month and state radon programs are making efforts to make this health risk known and to encourage people to take action by having their homes tested. Winter is an ideal time to test a home for radon. When a home is closed up during cooler weather months, radon concentrations increase.

Radon comes from the natural decay of uranium and is found in soil, rocks and water. As radon decays into radioactive particles, they can get trapped in your lungs when you breathe. As they break down further, these particles release small bursts of energy. This can damage lung tissue and lead to lung cancer over the course of your lifetime.

The amount of time between exposure and the onset of the disease may be many years. Not everyone exposed to elevated levels of radon will develop lung cancer, but a smoker exposed to radon has an even greater risk of developing lung cancer. Your chances of getting lung cancer from radon depend mostly on how much radon is in your home, the amount of time you spend in your home and whether you are a smoker or have ever smoked.

Based on radon surveys completed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, an estimated one out of every 15 homes in the U.S. has radon levels at or above the EPA Action Level of 4 picoCuries per liter of air (pCi/l). In Nevada, one out of every five homes were determined to have elevated radon levels.

However, as more homes have been tested through the Nevada Radon Education Program, the radon potential has increased in many areas compared to past radon surveys. With over 5,394 usable radon test results since September 2003, elevated radon levels have been found in one out of every four homes tested in Nevada. The highest radon potential is in Carson City, Douglas, Elko, Humboldt, Lander, Lincoln, Lyon, Mineral, Pershing, Washoe and White Pine counties. Sample sizes have been too small for Esmeralda, Eureka, and Storey counties to draw any conclusion about radon potential, but elevated radon levels have also been found in these counties.

The major source of radon concentrations in a home comes from the soil beneath a home, entering through foundation cracks, plumbing and utility openings and some of the porous materials used to construct foundations and floors. Radon can enter any home — old or new, well-sealed or drafty. Even homes with basements, slab on grade, crawl spaces or no visible foundation cracks are susceptible.

You can't predict which homes will have high radon levels, as two neighboring homes can have very different radon levels. Variables that determine radon levels include how the home was constructed, lifestyle factors and the strength of the radon source beneath the house. The only way to know a building's radon levels is to test. A simple three-day test can determine whether a home has elevated levels of radon. If high levels of radon are found, there is a fix for reducing radon levels.

UNCE offers radon test kits at most Cooperative Extension offices across the state. Free test kits currently are offered in Washoe, Douglas, Carson City/Storey, Southern Nye, Lincoln and Clark counties. Other counties offer test kits for \$5. For more information or to find out where to get a test kit, visit the Nevada Radon Education Program Web site, <http://www.unce.unr.edu/radon>, or call the Radon Hot Line, 888-RADON10 (888-723-6610). For a nominal shipping fee, you can also receive a test kit by mail.

For more information, visit the Nevada Radon Education Program Web site, <http://www.unce.unr.edu/radon>, or call the Radon Hot Line, 888-RADON10 (888-723-6610). For additional information on radon, contact the Nevada State Health Division, (775) 687-7531 or (775) 687-7536.

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