

RADON GAS, IT'S A KILLER

The information for this article came from the January 6, 2008 edition of The Daily Herald and the website for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

The Department of Environmental Quality has been trying to educate the public for some time on the dangers of radon gases and hopes that the danger of radon is becoming more widely known. Utah residents, especially Elk Ridge residents, may be exposed daily to a colorless, odorless gas without their knowledge. In January the DEQ encouraged all Utahans to test their homes for the gas, which is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. According to the DEQ, all 50 states have excessive radon levels and one in four homes in Utah may have radon levels exceeding EPA standards. This information should send the message that Elk Ridge residents could be living in a home that has unsafe radon levels.

What is radon gas? According to the Department of Environmental Quality, radon gasses come from uranium-bearing granite deposits in the soil. Although uranium is used in nuclear materials, the radon gases in our homes are not a man-made problem. This is a natural substance and is found in the geology of the Rocky Mountains. High levels of radon can cause lung cancer, but the health effects of the gas cannot be seen until the cancer develops. There is no way to know if your home is affected unless tests are run.

So how does radon gas get into our homes? Radon creeps into the home from the ground and the best place to test for the gas is in the lowest level of the home. The best time to test is in the winter when the warmer air in the house has lower pressure than the cold ground and draws in the most radon. Winter is the best time to test your home because the three to seven day tests require doors and windows to be shut almost all the time. During cooler weather, people are less likely to leave windows open. The use of swamp coolers in the summer can also bias the test.

What are the criteria by which we should judge the results of our radon test? The national average for radon levels is 1.5 PicoCuries per liter of air, while Utah average is 4.6. The EPA standard level at which action should be taken is 4 PicoCuries. Although levels vary from home to home, areas in Utah, Wasatch, Juab, and Salt Lake counties have levels between four (4) and ten (10) PicoCuries.

So how do the residents of Elk Ridge solve the problem of high radon levels in their homes? First is to purchase a test kit from a national website, Home Depot, Lowe's or from the Utah County Public Health Department for \$10.00. The all-inclusive kits are easy to use if homeowners follow the directions. If you find that the radon levels in your home are high, you can contact Fire Chief Seth Waite at 423-2300. He has personal experience testing and designing a system in his own home, and would be happy to help you with your test and help with the design of a system if you have high radon levels. Chief Waite says that a system can cost from \$1,500 to \$3,000 depending on the method used. For more information you can visit www.radon.utah.gov.

This is an issue that every Elk Ridge home should take seriously. It is important that we keep our homes safe for ourselves and our children.