

Test your home for radon to avoid the cancer-causing gas

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The leading cause of lung cancer in America for non-smokers doesn't come in a stick, and it's free and legal to citizens of all ages.

Each year, on average, radon gas kills 20,000 Americans -- more than drunken driving, fires and carbon monoxide. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking, and the most common cause for those who have never smoked, according to the World Health Organization.

January is National Radon Action Month, and officials are again warning about the dangers of the gas and advising homeowners to test their homes for the dangerous gas. According to the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, 20 percent of homes in Utah may have radon in concentrations above the "action level" of four picoCuries per liter of air, including areas in Utah County. The Utah DEQ lists Utah County in the range of four to 10 pCi/L.

Lance Madigan, spokesman for the Utah County Health Department, said radon is a natural and very common gas that could affect homes all over Utah County, and residents should get their homes tested in order to prevent the long-term health hazards of the gas. There is no way to know whether a home is affected by radon without testing for the gas.

"It's one of those odorless, colorless gases that you can't see or taste, and it has a cumulative effect," he said.

Madigan said it is easy and inexpensive to test a home for radon, and testing kits can be bought from local home improvement stores or the health department. According to the Utah County Health Department Web site, such kits are offered for \$10 from the department.

Radon is a natural byproduct of uranium in the soil. According to the Utah DEQ, radon gas can seep into homes through cracks in the floors and walls, construction joints, water supplies and other areas. Although radon gas in the home can be dangerous for inhabitants, Madigan said the problem can be fixed once it is detected.

"It's got to be vented," he said. "It's got to have some place to go."

For more information on radon and testing homes and buildings for the gas, visit www.radon.utah.gov or www.epa.gov/radon.