

# Survey reveals lack of radon awareness

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Carbon monoxide isn't the only silent threat inside homes anymore, but most Utahns don't know it. A survey performed by the U's Huntsman Cancer Institute and the Utah Department of Environmental Quality revealed that the majority of Utahns are unaware of the noxious radioactive gas infiltrating households worldwide.

Radon, which is a radioactive gas released from the decay of uranium in rocks and soil, is undetectable by human senses alone. Only when a person is overly exposed to the gas can the side effects on the body make its presence known. Radon leaks into homes through cracks in the floor and can build up to high levels, said Jeff Yancey, a cancer information specialist from the Cancer Learning Center at the U.

"Since it is basically invisible, people don't act on it," said Christine Keyser, an indoor radon coordinator at the Utah Division of Radiation Control.

According to the National Cancer Institute, the gas carries tiny radioactive particles that, when inhaled, cause the cells that line the lungs to deteriorate. As a result, radon is now the foremost cause of lung cancer to non-smokers—an estimated 15,000 to 22,000 people die of radon-induced lung cancer per year.

The survey's results were released Jan. 5, the same day Gov. Gary Herbert announced January as Radon Action Month.

The survey had 232 respondents and nearly all had heard of the element, but only 20 percent were able to correctly answer the descriptive questions about radon. Only 12 percent of the response group confirmed that they test their home for the radon, the only way to check for the presence and amount of the toxic gas. Ignorance or apathy are possible explanations for such a low number of people testing their homes, Keyser said.

"It doesn't matter how old the home is, or what part of Utah you live in, areas from all over have reported high levels of radon gas," Keyser said.

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