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Utah kicks off 2012 radon awareness campaign

Health • The colorless, odorless, radioactive gas can affect about 30% of homes in the state.

By JUDY FAHYS

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Utah has traditionally celebrated Radon Action Month throughout January as part of a national campaign led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

This year, Gov. Gary Herbert shrunk the awareness campaign in Utah to just a week: this week. But events aimed at keeping radon on your radar will continue through the month, said Herbert spokeswoman Ally Isom.

“Radon Action Month is a national recognition,” Isom said, noting that Utah is one of few states with full-time staff focused on radon. “We support that with the state declaration, as our practice is to issue declarations for specific weeks to heighten public awareness.”

In Washington on Wednesday, the EPA kicked off its annual January ritual of reminding Americans to test their homes for harmful levels of radon gas.

A colorless, odorless radioactive gas, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. It can seep into homes from underground and build up in indoor air.

High radon levels are estimated to cause about 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year.

Gina McCarthy, of EPA’s office of air and radiation, notes that elevated radon levels can be found in as many as one in 15 homes nationally, and it’s even higher in some communities.

“Testing for radon is an easy and important step in protecting the health of your family,” she said in a news release.

By testing radon levels at home, and venting radon higher than four picocuries per liter of air, families can help prevent lung cancer, said the EPA.

In Utah, highlights of the awareness campaign include:

- An awards event hosted by Herbert for state radon poster contest winners Anna Pinnock, Maren Maxfield and Spencer Bickel.
- A free CE Radon Course (core credit) is being offered for real estate professionals and building contractors. Go to a website calendar of events for details: www.radon.utah.gov.
- The Cottonwood Heights LDS stake is offering a free public radon presentation, at Height Stake, 6890 S. Whitmore Way (2225 East).
- Cancer Survivors Against Radon will hold a Capitol Steps rally Jan. 25, at noon, in Salt Lake City.

John Hultquist of Utah’s Division of Radiation Control noted that his office has information about do-it-yourself home testing, hiring a radon certified professional and upcoming radon-action events.

“Since elevated levels of radon gas can occur in three out of every 10 homes in Utah, I strongly encourage all Utah residents to test for radon,” he said in a news release. “Testing is the only way to know if you and your family are at risk.”

Hultquist also said that, while there are costs involved in fixing a radon problem, it is money well spent in light of the fact that lung cancer has just a 15 percent survival rate five years after diagnosis.

Isom said not to read any inferences into Herbert's decision to shrink the state's awareness campaign from a year — as it has been in the past — to a week.

“Nothing has changed,” she said. “There are many great causes to which the governor wants to bring public attention. Radon is certainly one of them.”

fahys@sltrib.com

Twitter: judyfutah

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More information

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency urges the public to contact state radon offices, visit www.epa.gov/radon or to call 1-800-SOS-RADON. The Federal Radon Action Plan can be seen online at: www.epa.gov/radon/action_plan.html

Utah's radon office is also offering short-term radon test kits for \$6, a fee that includes laboratory analysis. To order by phone, call 1-800-324-5928, ext. 22, or online at www.radon.utah.gov.

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