

# **Radon's invisible intrusion**

*EPA urging all homeowners to test for cancer-causing gas*

**Alex Breitler, Stockton Record, 1-11-10**

Ask the next person you meet on the street what the No. 1 cause of lung cancer is and you'll get a quick answer.

Smoking.

Ask them the No. 2 cause, responsible for 21,000 deaths a year throughout the United States and they'll hesitate.

It is radon, a gas that seeps up from the soil into your home, invisible to the eye and mostly absent from public understanding.

"We learned about radon in seventh-grade chemistry," said Tracy Sestili, founder of the nonprofit lung cancer awareness group Beverly Fund in San Francisco.

But who remembers that far back?

Elevated levels of household radon have been found in every county in the U.S., including San Joaquin and, to a greater degree, Calaveras.

Concern is growing. The World Health Organization in 2009 issued a global call-to-action; the Environmental Protection Agency recently urged every homeowner to find out if radon is a problem.

"Test now," EPA spokeswoman Bonnie Smith said. Free kits are available.

## **It sounds dangerous. What is radon?**

Radon is the gas produced when uranium breaks down in soil, rocks or water. It sneaks through the smallest cracks in your foundation, attaches to dust in the air and gets sucked into your lungs.

The EPA estimates that as many as 8 million homes have elevated levels of radon, but most have not been checked.

## **What about my neighborhood?**

Every home can be different, but you can get some idea of the risk by checking the results of radon tests for every Zip Code in California as of August. See data from the California Department of Public Health at <http://tinyurl.com/yzxppo9>.

## **Here's what you'll find:**

◆ Of the 150 tests conducted in San Joaquin County homes, 26 registered radon at levels at which the EPA

recommends taking action to reduce radon.

◆ Of the 832 tests in Calaveras County, 252 reported radon at the same level of concern. Radon is a bigger problem in the mountains because of the quantities of granite.

Translating those numbers into quantifiable health impacts is difficult. The risk is based on a lifetime of exposure.

"It's something we're certainly aware of," said Brian Moss, head of the Calaveras County Environmental Management Agency.

### **How do I get a test?**

Calaveras County is offering free radon detection kits to its residents. Call (209) 754-6399.

Folks elsewhere can get free kits, too, through the Beverly Fund. E-mail [info@beverlyfund.org](mailto:info@beverlyfund.org) and include your name and address.

Just leave the small kit in the lowest room of your house, with the windows shut, for 48 hours. Then you mail the kit to a lab and can get the results online, Sestili said.

If you're over the health threshold - 4 picocuries per liter - it is recommended that you bring in an expert to suggest repairs, which, according to the EPA, typically cost \$800 to \$2,500.

### **Areas of concern**

Some radon "hot spots" in our region, according to a compilation of tests conducted in homes:

- Valley Springs — 173 tests, 44 results above health standard
- Arnold — 133 tests, 56 above health standard
- Murphys — 126 tests, 36 above health standard
- Avery — 21 tests, 15 above health standard
- Stockton Zip code 95207 — 37 tests, 12 above health standard

Source: California Department of Public Health