

Dealing With
RADON
in
Real Estate Transactions



Idaho Division of Health

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For more information on radon and lists of certified professionals:

www.neha-nrpp.org (NEHA NRPP)
or www.nrsb.org (NRSB)

For more information on radon publications:

<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/radon/pubs/>

Costs associated with this publication are available from the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, IDHW, 1,000-12072-8/03. Cost per unit \$.37

More and more, informed buyers are having radon tests performed when considering the purchase of a home or office building.

Finding elevated concentrations of radon doesn't mean you should walk away from your dream home!

Radon reduction technology has improved so much over the last few years that reducing radon is easy and affordable.

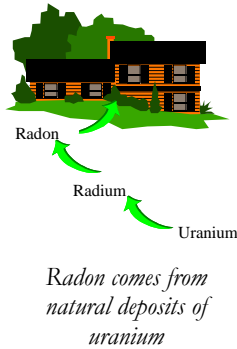
*If you like a home,
buy it -
radon can be reduced!*

*Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
Division of Health*

What is radon?

Radon is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless radioactive gas created from *natural* deposits of uranium and radium in the soil. Radon gas can be drawn into a building and accumulate to concentrations that can increase the potential for contracting lung cancer.

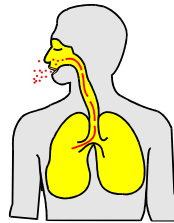
Although there are rare cases where the source of the radon has come from building materials created from spent-uranium processing plants, the major source of radon in Idaho homes comes from natural deposits of uranium commonly found in Idaho geology. It is seldom caused by human intervention.



Why should I be concerned?

Once created in the underlying soil or geology, radon is easily drawn into a home through its foundation. Radon is a radioactive gas that decays into a series of solid particles known as radon decay products. These particles can be inhaled into your lungs where they can release alpha radiation leading to an increased potential of lung cancer.

It has been shown in carefully controlled studies on animals, hard-rock miners, and most recently confirmed in residential case-control studies, that the effects of the radon decay products (due to prolonged exposure to elevated levels of radon) can significantly increase the potential of lung cancer.



Exposure to radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer

Radon is regarded as a Group A carcinogen; that is, it is known to cause cancer in humans with prolonged exposure. Many buyers are concerned about their health risk, as well as property resale value and want to test for and correct radon concerns.

Special note to sellers and listing agents

The Idaho Property Condition Disclosure Act requires that the seller of a property provide to prospective buyers information about the property including any “hazardous materials” on the property. This would be true even if previous test results were less than 4.0 pCi/L. In all cases, sellers should provide copies of any test results. If a radon mitigation system exists, it also is to be disclosed, as it is presumed that radon had existed previously, and that if the system were to fail, the radon level would return to its original level.

On the other hand, if radon concerns are discovered, understand that they can be remedied through mitigation and that normal real estate negotiation techniques can be used to resolve the costs associated with radon reduction.

How do I find qualified radon measurement and mitigation contractors?

The State of Idaho recognizes qualified credentialing organizations that certify radon measurement and mitigation professionals, as well as analytical laboratories. Lists of these trained individuals can be found from the web sites listed on the back cover. In addition to these educational credentials, homeowners should always:

1. Ask for references;
2. Require proof of certification, including agreement to follow protocols and codes of ethics;
3. Ask for proof of insurance including workers' compensation; and
4. Ask for a clear contract with details of guarantee and warranty.

Resources

A multitude of publications and resources are available from the U.S. EPA. Visit the EPA web site listed on the back cover for a listing of publications regarding health risks of radon and options available to consumers for testing and, if needed, mitigating your home. If you have questions, you can also contact the Idaho Division of Health at (800) 445-8647.

Do new homes have radon systems?

A considerable number of homebuilders routinely add elements to their construction of a home that can reduce radon. Some go so far as to install a full system with fan. In most parts of Idaho, this is not a requirement of the code, but rather a value-added feature that a large number of home buyers are requesting.

There are a lot of advantages to installing a system as a house is built:

- The piping can be easily concealed in a chase;
- The vent pipe can exit the roof and appear as a normal roof penetration; and
- The sub-grade can be prepared to make it easy to collect radon.

During the construction of a home, it is easy to treat several foundations connecting each area to a single vent, which also can be concealed in walls. When done properly, the system often works without the need to install and operate a fan.



It is especially helpful if the contractor routes the vent pipe in such a manner that if, after the home is tested and the levels are not acceptable, a fan can easily be installed in the vent pipe within the attic to make the system more effective.

Always ask your builder about radon resistant features and if a system is installed.

Always test the home to be sure it reduces the radon to levels with which you are comfortable.

How common is radon in Idaho?

Surveys conducted by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare indicate that approximately 36 percent of Idaho homes have radon concentrations in excess of the EPA guideline of 4.0 pCi/L. Because of an increased awareness about radon and who could be affected, more homes are being tested. These studies also provide some other useful facts:

Idaho Radon Facts

- ◆ Elevated levels of radon have been found in almost every county in Idaho.
- ◆ Elevated levels of radon are found in both new and old buildings.
- ◆ Radon can be found in non-residential buildings.
- ◆ Radon can be found in homes built on all types of foundations, including crawlspaces and slab-on-grade basements.
- ◆ Radon is not just a concern in Idaho. Many other states have a high percentage of homes with elevated radon levels.
- ◆ Radon can vary from house to house. The only way to know how much radon may be in the house you are buying is to have it tested.

Could there be radon in my water?

Yes, radon can dissolve in the groundwater and be released into the air of the home when it is used for showers, laundry, and other purposes. The concern with radon in water is not widespread and is primarily associated with homes whose water supplies are from wells or public water supplies that use groundwater.

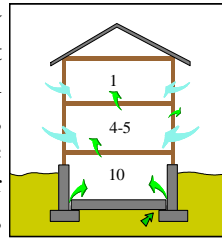
The major concern is not with drinking the water, but rather the additional amount of radon added into the breathing space beyond that which comes from the soil. Normal radon in air tests will measure this contribution, if the house is occupied during testing. It takes a lot of radon in the water to have a measurable effect in the indoor air radon concentrations. As a rule, it takes 10,000 pCi/L in the water to add one additional pCi/L of radon in the air. Always test the air first, before testing or becoming concerned with radon in the water. Your radon testing professional should be able to provide guidance.

How do I test for radon?

Over the last 15 years, reliable testing devices and methods have been developed to determine indoor radon exposures. When using approved measurement devices, you can either determine the radon potential of the home (short-term test) or what your exposure likely will be after you move in (long-term test).

How do I determine radon potential in my home?

Often, at the time of resale, it is desirable to know what the potential radon exposures could be, independent of how a person operates or lives in a building. Radon enters a building through its foundation - the basement, crawlspace, or slab. As the radon moves up in the building, it is diluted with air that leaks through exterior walls and openings from the outside air. Consequently, radon levels typically are the highest in the lowest portion of the home suitable for occupancy.



Radon concentrations typically are the highest in the lowest occupiable portion of a home

If a test is conducted in the lowest level of the home suitable for occupancy, with all the exterior doors and windows closed, one would be able to say with reasonable assurance that the exposures in upper levels of the home are less than the reading obtained in lower levels. It also can be assumed the exposure would be less when fresh outdoor air is allowed into the home. Short-term tests typically are conducted over a two to three day period, and the results represent the radon potential of the home. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Surgeon General recommend that people not have long-term exposures in excess of 4.0 pCi/L.

What does a short-term test tell me?

If a short-term radon test is conducted in the lowest occupiable portion of a home while all exterior doors and windows are closed for a minimum of two days, one can reasonably say:

- Radon concentrations are less on upper floors;
- The annual average under normal lived-in conditions, is likely to be less than 4.0 pCi/L if the short-term result is less than 4.0 pCi/L; and
- The home has potential for being above 4.0 pCi/L. You should consider follow-up testing if the short-term result is at or above 4.0 pCi/L.

Key elements to radon mitigation

Your first consideration should be to use a qualified contractor who will install the system in accordance with the U.S. EPA's Radon Mitigation Standards and local building codes. Some of these standards are as follows:

- ◆ The discharge point of the system can contain elevated levels of radon. To avoid exposure to occupants and neighbors it must be:
 - At least 10 feet above grade;
 - At least 10 feet away from an opening which is two feet below the discharge; and
 - Above or at the eave of the roof.

The piping also can be routed up the outside the home, but the discharge still must meet the above criteria to be a proper system.

- ◆ System fans should not be located inside the home or in a crawlspace. They can be in an attic, outdoors, or in a garage, provided there is no living space above the garage.
- ◆ There should be an indicator located in a prominent location that will easily indicate to the occupant that the system is functioning properly.
- ◆ Power to the fan should be run in accordance with local electric codes, including permits where required.
- ◆ All portions of the system are to be labeled and a simple instruction manual, with warranties, provided to the homeowner.
- ◆ All homes with mitigation systems should be retested no sooner than 24 hours (nor later than 30 days) after installation to verify reduction. The home also should be retested every two years.

What impacts the cost of mitigation?

The cost of a mitigation system is a function of the extra effort taken by the contractor to conceal the system and to maintain the aesthetic value of your home. Although a system routed up the outside of the house will reduce radon quite well, it may not be as aesthetically pleasing as one that was routed through the interior of the house with trim installed to conceal it.

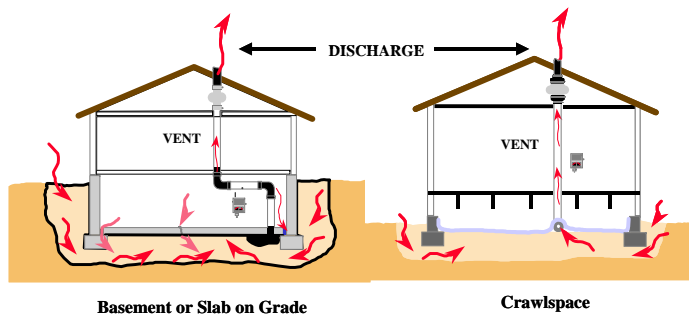
An increasing number of buyers are getting involved in how these systems will be installed, or waiting until they occupy the house to better control the manner in which their system will be installed.

How do I mitigate radon?

Considerable research has been conducted by governmental agencies, educational institutions, and private industry that forms a very strong foundation for properly mitigating radon in homes, schools and commercial buildings. The techniques are straightforward, reliable and typically can be done in one day by a qualified contractor.

However, simple radon reduction requires more than trying to seal openings in the foundation. *Caulking and sealing of foundation openings, on its own, has proven NOT to be a suitable technique.*

Radon is mitigated by installing a system that will draw the radon-laden soil gas from beneath the foundation and exhaust it outside of the building, far enough away from windows and other openings that it will not reenter.



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average Installation Cost: \$1200 • Average Operating Cost: \$3/mo | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected Fan Lifespan: 11 years • Fan Replacement Cost: \$145-\$300 • Periodic Maintenance: None |
|---|--|

A reduction system typically consists of a plastic pipe connected to the soil either through a hole in a slab, via a sump lid connection, or access beneath a plastic sheet in a crawlspace. Attached to the pipe is a quiet, continuously operating fan that discharges the radon outdoors.

How this is done is a function of the construction of the home, rather than the radon concentrations that exist. A home with more than one foundation can present challenges to collecting the soil gas from under all portions of the building. However, talented mitigation contractors typically can connect multiple systems together so that only one fan system is required.

Crawlspace foundations can be more costly, since the contractor needs to install a high density plastic sheet over the soil and seal it to the walls and then route the piping to the fan. However, the added benefit of reducing moisture in the crawlspace, in addition to reducing radon, can be a real plus.

How do I determine what my exposure will be in my new home?

The amount of radon you may be exposed to is a function of where you will spend time in the home and how much fresh air is available in your home. The only reliable way of measuring your actual radon exposure is to conduct a long-term test for a minimum of 91 days after you move into the home.

In the past, people have been reluctant to purchase a home and perform a long-term test for fear of not being able to correct a radon problem once it is confirmed. Now that the technology and durability of radon mitigation has been well established, buyers need not be reluctant to buy a home, or to test it to their satisfaction and take action to reduce radon after they move in.

This does not mean that you should avoid having a short-term test done as part of your home inspection process, but rather, if the results of that test show a potential radon concern, you may wish to consider a long-term test. By performing a long-term test after you move in, you can control test conditions and, if needed, make decisions on how the mitigation system will be installed to accomplish the best reduction and to increase the value of your new home.

The test purpose will dictate test conditions

Radon Potential:

- Short-term test
- Typically 2-5 days
- Closed building conditions 12 hours prior to and all during test
- Device deployed on lowest occupiable level of home
- Commonly used at time of resale

Occupant Exposure:

- Long-term test
- Typically 91 days - one year
- Normal lived-in conditions without special closed building conditions
- Device deployed on lowest occupied level of home
- Commonly used outside of a real estate transaction, or used as basis of escrow fund release

Radon decay products (actual health risk of radon) also can be measured using special equipment that reports in Working Levels (WL). This is typically done after initial measurements have identified a potential concern in commercial buildings or homes with relatively low initial radon readings. The EPA guidance for radon decay products (comparable to 4.0 pCi/L of radon) is that people should avoid long-term exposures in excess of 0.02 WL of radon decay products.

Key points about testing

First, it is strongly recommended that you use a qualified radon professional who has been trained in the proper placement of radon measurement devices and the interpretation of their results. A list of certified individuals can be obtained from the web sites listed on the back cover. Here are some tips for testing and for reducing radon:

- ◆ Radon tests are to be placed in livable areas - not crawlspaces or attics.
- ◆ Radon tests are to be placed no closer than 20 inches to the floor, and no closer than three feet from openings in exterior walls, such as windows and doors.
- ◆ Collecting data for less than 48 hours is not valid for determining the need to mitigate, or reduce, radon in a home.
- ◆ When doing a short-term test of less than 90 days, all exterior doors and windows are to be closed other than normal entry, and the device is to be placed in lowest level of home suitable for occupancy.
- ◆ When doing a long-term test of more than 90 days, no special conditions are required for exterior doors and windows, and the device typically is placed in the lowest level of a home that is frequently occupied.
- ◆ Radon levels vary from season to season and long-term tests are the preferred method for determining health risk.
- ◆ Only one room on the selected level of the home needs to be tested.
- ◆ If the radon measurement professional performs two short-term tests at the same location and under the same conditions, but at different times, the results should be averaged. It is not acceptable to continue to test until a preferred result is obtained.
- ◆ Radon test results obtained from different parts of the home are NOT averaged.
- ◆ During short-term tests, evaporative coolers (swamp coolers) and other devices that exchange considerable air to the outside should be shut-off.
- ◆ Test devices should not be placed in locations with temperature differences of $\pm 10^{\circ}$ F from room temperature, on hot surfaces, or in areas of elevated humidity.
- ◆ Continuous monitors (which measure radon hourly) are often used to detect occupant tampering of test conditions.
- ◆ If a continuous monitor is used, the average of the measurements is used to determine the need for follow-up, rather than the highest reading observed.

If I find a home with a radon problem, should I look for another home?

If a properly performed test indicates an elevated level of radon in the home you wish to purchase, consider taking a reasoned approach that will confirm levels and positively reduce the radon. Perhaps the best news about radon is that **radon can be reduced**, either before you buy the home or after you move in.



Of all the problems a house may have, radon is one of the easiest to identify and fix!

How should I approach radon testing in my search for a new home?

Radon testing is simple. Here is a common approach:

1. Find the house you want to buy.
2. As part of the home inspection process, request a short-term radon test, using a qualified radon measurement professional. Your home inspector may or may not be qualified to conduct radon testing.
3. If the short-term test result is less than 4.0 pCi/L, the EPA would not recommend any follow-up action, although there still is some risk at exposures less than 4.0 pCi/L.
4. If the short-term test result is 4.0 pCi/L or higher, then consider asking the seller to fix it, or consider purchasing the home and performing a long-term test to determine the actual exposure.
5. Once you decide to reduce radon in the house, seek bids from qualified contractors who are willing to guarantee and warranty results.
6. Use bids from contractors to either fix the home prior to moving in, or after you take possession. Bids can be used as a basis for negotiations or even establishing escrow funds that can be used to mitigate the house once elevated levels have been confirmed.

Test the home. If the radon is higher than you want, take comfort that it can be fixed; even after you take possession.