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# How To "Deal" With Radon



## An Agent's Guide to Smoother Selling

# An Agent's Guide to Smoother Selling

An unidentified real estate agent states: "Radon - It just gets in the way of making sales. If the house tests "high," everybody's in a panic. The seller is angry, the buyer is apprehensive, and we're left scrambling to keep the deal together. And for what? Nobody seems to be sure it's even a health risk. Besides, I've heard there's not much of a problem around here, anyway. To be honest, I cringe at the very sound of the word!"

## There Is No Reason For Radon To Ever Kill Your Deal.

If the quotes above express your sentiments, this guide is for you. Its purpose is to provide real estate professionals with the information and perspective necessary to effectively deal with the radon issue and keep it from ever interfering with your livelihood - selling houses.

## First Things First: Accepting the Inevitable

Like it or not, radon concerns are not going away. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Housing Administration, the American Lung Association and the Consumer Federation of America recommend that All homebuyers test for radon. Employee relocation companies accepted this fact several years ago. Ignoring it, or worse yet, fighting it, will eventually cause you problems.

Once you've learned to put radon into proper perspective, there is no reason for it to interfere with your deal. Legal experts suggest informing buyers of EPA's radon test recommendation is the best way to protect yourself from liability. Then, no one can later accuse you of negligence.

## What NOT to Tell Buyers About Radon Testing

Once the buyer is aware of EPA's radon test recommendation, avoid making any statement that could be construed as an attempt to talk them out of it, leaving you responsible.

**Don't Say,** "Radon really isn't a problem around here." Although some areas certainly have a lower incidence, houses with elevated levels can be found most everywhere. And, two houses side-by-side can have totally different indoor concentrations. If the buyer later discovers a problem, they will likely remember it was you who told them a test was unnecessary. Remember EPA test recommendations don't exclude the homebuyers in your community.

**Don't Say,** "There's no reason to test this house because...it's a new house," or It's on a crawlspace," or It doesn't have a basement."

**Disclosing the EPA recommendation that all homebuyers test for radon is the best way for agents to protect themselves.**

Radon is an equal opportunity pollutant. New houses as well as those with crawlspace or slab-on-grade foundations are all susceptible. Only houses built on pier foundations or apartments above the third floor are less likely to contain elevated radon concentrations.

**Don't Say,** "Radon isn't even proven to be a health risk." Radon is a Class A carcinogen, meaning it is known to cause cancer in humans. The scientific community and every major health organization ranks radon as the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer, causing an estimated 21,000 U.S. deaths annually. Like it or not, the buyer will look to you for guidance and expertise. If your responses are inconsistent with government agencies and major health organizations, the buyer will be more apprehensive, and you could be held accountable should that buyer discover a problem in the future.

## Why Should The Agent Be Concerned About the Quality of the Radon Test?

Not only are unsophisticated test devices less reliable than electronic monitors, they are extremely susceptible to tampering. Cheap devices are unable to detect whether or not the protocol test conditions have been violated or whether the device has been disturbed.

What if the buyer should later discover elevated levels and suspect tampering occurred on their original test? The real estate agents will be accused along with the seller because of their perceived motivation to make the sale. **You may find yourself in the unfortunate position of defending your integrity because of an unscrupulous seller's deceitful misconduct.**

Employee relocation companies have known for years that real-time, electronic tests are the best way to avoid liability. Hourly readings record unusual swings in the radon concentration that occurs when test conditions have been altered, and tilt sensors detect whether the monitor has been disturbed. **More importantly, the seller is far more respectful of a radon monitor with "intelligence" and far less likely to risk committing fraud.**

Finally, sophisticated radon monitors provide fast results. Cheap detectors usually require mailing to the lab for analysis and waiting for days. Don't risk having to postpone the closing. **Insist on the Radalink Radon TeleMonitor. See the back page for details!**

## Dealing With a High Test When Talking to the Seller - Avoid the Blame Game

Few sellers will have any previous experience with radon. When told their home contains an invisible pollutant, their first reaction may often be to blame someone for what they perceive to be a big fuss over nothing. "Humph! I've lived in this home for sixteen years and I ain't dead. This is just some rip-off the federal government made up to make my life miserable."

If the real estate agents join in the blame game, a molehill quickly becomes a mountain.

**Don't Say,** "Yeah, you're absolutely right. That blasted EPA is full of it. I hear they can't even prove it's harmful. I could just shoot that inspector for bringing radon up in the first place. Besides, this test can't be right; I've never heard of any other problems in this neighborhood."

Statements like that from the agent will only reinforce the seller's initial anger and convince them they're being victimized. You'll only drive a wedge between buyer and seller that's difficult to remove.

**To effectively keep the high test from being an obstacle, keep it in proper perspective.** If the inspector had discovered all the gutters and downspouts around the house were rusty and needed to be replaced, the seller would accept that with minimal grumbling. After all, he can justify the necessity because he can see the rusty holes, the rotted gutter boards, or water in the basement.

**Quickly explain that fixing a radon problem is just another home repair,** easily and inexpensively performed by a NEHA Certified or state licensed contractor. Although, the cost may vary depending on the size and design of the home, one could spend considerably more replacing those old rusty gutters. Assure them the problem is easily resolved and won't interfere with their ability to sell the house. Remember, the seller is looking to you for validation that the buyer's concern is justified.

## When Talking to the Buyer, Have All the Right Answers

Like sellers, buyers generally have little or no experience with radon. Their concerns are two-fold. "Will living in this house jeopardize the health of our family? and "Does the presence of elevated radon diminish the property value?"

Because buyers rely on you for assurance, it is important for you to have the correct responses. Any uncertainty on your part will only feed their anxiety. Treat the situation as routine - a molehill, not a mountain. Radon mitigation is simple and effective, permanently reducing concentrations to well below the EPA Action Level.

**Active Soil Depressurization (ASD) mitigation systems prohibit moist, soil air from being drawn into the house, reducing the potential for mold and mildew.** Lower humidity will obviously make the room air more comfortable and damp, musty odors may be eliminated.

ASD can also prevent other soil contaminants like methane, pesticides, and herbicides from entering the home. Homebuyers can breathe easy! Installation of an ASD system will enhance the overall air quality.

Very little maintenance is required and operating costs are

generally less than \$75 a year for the fan electricity and minor loss of conditioned air exfiltrating to the ground. The fan isn't "maxed" to capacity air flow or suction capability, meaning there is very little "load" on the motor. Since it runs constantly, it doesn't receive the wear and tear of cycling on and off, meaning it will last a long time. The control system is so quiet and unobtrusive; the homeowner will barely notice it exists.

Radon control systems in no way diminish the dollar value of the home and are accepted nationally as a home improvement.

And finally, since reduction systems lower the radon concentrations so effectively and eliminate peak fluctuations, living in a mitigated home reduces one's risk of getting lung cancer to as low as reasonably achievable (ALARA) - even lower than living in most houses testing below the EPA Action Level (4 pCi/l) with no control system.

**There is absolutely no reason for buyers to allow elevated radon to keep them from purchasing a house they otherwise adore.**

## What If The Test Is Just Barely Over the EPA Action Level of 4 pCi/l?

### Does it really need to be mitigated?

EPA technical support documents reveal that a short-term test made according to EPA Real Estate Testing Protocols will result in making the correct decision 95% of the time. In other words, a house testing high very likely has an annual average radon concentration exceeding 4 pCi/l, and the buyer would be justified in insisting on remedial action. However, the greatest likelihood of making an incorrect decision occurs when the short-term test is at or barely above the Action Level. For example, if the two-day test result is 4.1 pCi/l, there is a 50% chance the long term average concentration is actually less than 4 pCi/l. **What can be done in this situation to protect both buyer and seller?**

### Treat it as routine - easily solved with a simple home repair.

One popular solution, if everyone is agreeable obtain a couple of remedial cost estimates and place the necessary funds in an escrow account. Then after the buyer moves in the house, a 90-day test is performed. If the result of the longer test confirms the average concentration is at or above 4 pCi/l, remediation can be performed with the escrowed funds. If the 90-day test indicates the average is less than 4 pCi/l, the escrow can be returned to the appropriate party.

Naturally, this option must be agreeable to the buyers. Sometimes they will not want to wait, or the closing attorneys will balk at setting up the escrow. But often times this is a sensible way of handling those borderline situations, say 4-6 pCi/l.

### Helpful Hint

Know who does radon mitigation in your community. For a complete list of NEHA Proficient or licensed contractors in your state, contact any professional home inspector equipped with the Radalink Radon TeleMonitor.