

TALES FROM THE CRAWLSPACE

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Propertyexam

Radon is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer. What should we do?

Radon is a serious problem. However, its presence should probably not affect anyone's decision whether or not to buy a home. Seems like conflicting information doesn't it? The problem with Radon is that the media has circulated some information, but not enough. There's just enough going around scaring people, but not enough for anyone to actually make an informed decision about anything. Let's try to de-mystify Radon and Real Estate. I'll try to do this without mentioning "picocuries" or other distractions.

Radon comes from the ground. Uranium is the ultimate source of Radon; it is present in all rocks to some extent. Some rocks have more, some have less, consequently some areas have more radon emanating from the soil, and some areas have less. Granite is a higher source of radon, we have a lot of granite in the soil. Radon is a gas, because it is a gas it is mobile and escapes through fractures and openings in the rock and soil. In the beautiful Pacific Northwest we are in an area that is relatively high in Radon content. This does not mean that everywhere there are high Radon concentrations. The passages through the ground into structures are different and one house can have higher radon levels and the one next to it may not.

Let us now look at the Radon factors that affect Real Estate and buying decisions. It is important to know is that what is going on under the ground changes. There is movement below the soil (we have small earthquakes, shifting, settling) all the time. The level of Radon in any given structure or area, can change. Testing a building for Radon does not show that it will remain in that condition. It may not have Radon now, but that can change. It may have Radon now but that could change over time. Testing for Radon is simple but has inherent problems within this context. Only a short term, 48 hour test can be conducted within the constraints of a Real Estate transaction. A short term, 48 hour test does not give a true indication of what

any particular occupant would be exposed to within a given structure. People have different habits that will change the ventilation of the home, and ventilation will affect the concentration of Radon within. A long term, 90 day test gives a much more accurate picture of what is going on within any particular home with respect to Radon exposure. Long term, 90 day radon test kits are available on line for about \$35 (check Amazon.com). This is a fraction of the cost involved in a professional short term test and processed by the same laboratories. Unfortunately there isn't time for this within the confines of a transaction period.

Lastly, Radon remediation systems are not particularly expensive (within the consideration of buying a home). Typically a professional installation of a Radon removal/remediation system is about \$650 to \$1500. The amount depends upon the configuration of the structure and what kind of foundation it has. The worst case does not seem to be reason enough to walk away from a place that you love. It's hard to find a property where everything falls into place, Radon alone should not be "the last straw".

I'm not saying, don't test for Radon. We should all do long term tests every few years in the homes we live in, or buy electronic testers and run them continuously (about \$130). For those who want to use Radon presence to negotiate the cost of a remediation system, most Home inspectors can provide this added service for about \$150 (including FedEx, quick lab results, chain of custody, etc.). However, regardless of short term test results, I encourage everyone to do a long term test, when they occupy the home.