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Radon Today™

Up A Creek With A Paddle

Over the years here at *Radon Today* we have seen a number of mission statements from organizations but this one really caught our eye:

The Ginger Creek Foundation (GCF) is "embarking on a wonderful journey to build a strong non-profit organization...Along the way GCF, its donors and volunteers will assist county health departments, and others, find funding for low and middle income families, financially challenged schools and other facilities to support radon testing and mitigation."

As we have been saying for years it is the segment of the population with the least amount of money that is exposed to the greatest radon risks. It is one of the reasons we blasted Housing and Urban Development (HUD); this Federal agency tasked with making sure that dwellings that come under its programs are free from environmental hazards ignores the issue of radon.

So what is a low income homeowner to do about radon? Do they test and just cross their fingers that the levels are low? Many who do test know in advance that should a mitigation be required they certainly don't have the money. Enter an organization like GCF and its wonderful story.


Once upon a time a family in Kentucky consisting of "six disabled and illiterate adult family members" reached out to a man (insert hero) named Kenny Cole, Senior Environmental Health Specialist, Estill County Health Department, about a sewer problem. While talking to him the subject of their basement came up and one of the things Mr. Cole mentioned was radon. The family made the decision to test and with Mr. Cole's help a total of three tests were conducted.

Keep in mind that the EPA currently cites a recommended radon action level of 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L) and many in the industry point out that this is by no means considered a "safe" level. The first test came in at 23.0pCi/L. The second was 28.2 pCi/L and a third test conducted with the second was 19.4 pCi/L. Now what? This family certainly needed to have the house mitigated but did not have the

money to do so.

Mr. Cole got in touch with Kenny McLaughlin (insert hero #2) of the mitigation company Radon Solutions of Kentucky. Mr. McLaughlin was not only willing to charge less than his normal rate, but also began the work without the guarantee that he'd be paid at all. To top it off it was a mitigation project that needed major modifications to get the radon levels down to an acceptable point.

Mr. Cole then began the process of fund raising to pay Mr. McLaughlin and also got the local media interested in the story. His "office was flooded with calls about radon and requests for test kits. Local civic organizations and schools requested radon presentation speakers from the county health department." Mr. Cole said the project, "certainly brought to light the need for



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some type of pool or revolving loan to aid in low-income mitigation projects.”

Enter the Ginger Creek Foundation (insert the cavalry arriving just in time). This foundation is non-profit and was brought to life with seed money donated by Calvin Murphy, formerly of DuPage Radon Contractors, Inc.; Marjorie Wallé, Ed.D., Illinois Emergency Management Agency (which houses the Illinois Radon Program) and Stephen Teeple. The mitigation in Kentucky was its first rescue but won't be its last. Other organizations who donated funds to this particular mitigation are: the Foundation for Safer Housing, the National Association of Certified Home Inspectors and the Estill County Ministerial Association.

The industry has long needed an organization like GCF. Although it is based in Illinois it has a national reach. I would like to personally thank those involved for starting it with a special thank you to Marjorie Wallé who has always taken the time to answer my questions. I have to tell you this story made my day.

For more information about the Ginger Creek Foundation you may call (217) 546-9474; e-mail gingercreekfdn@insightbb.com or write them at P.O. Box 9463, Springfield, IL 62791.

was desperate to have them come and remove it. How did she know her house had radon? She could not only smell it but her hands and feet were black, her eyes were watering and her chest hurt. She was urged by the radon company to call her gas company immediately. But at least she knew about radon.

Sometimes the awareness is right on. In October 2007, Governor Tim Pawlenty signed a bill into law that requires all new homes to have radon systems, making the great state of Minnesota the first in the nation to protect its citizens in this way. This bill was authored by Senator Linda Higgins of Minneapolis and Representative Kim Norton of Rochester.

No small part of the success of this bill is owed to Elizabeth Hoffmann a representative for CanSAR (Cancer Survivors Against Radon). I first wrote about her last year. She has never smoked nor has she ever been around second hand smoke; there is no family history of lung cancer and yet she is bravely battling lung cancer. Elizabeth and her family investigated possible causes and attributed it to radon when her home test result came back at 8.6 pCi/L.

She went public with her story around three years ago to the media in Minnesota and it had such an impact that thousands of people in that state (perhaps as many as 87,000) had their homes tested for radon after hearing her story. The CanSAR website lists its purpose as being two-fold. “First to put a face on radon, empowering sufferers of an apparent radon-induced lung cancer (and their families) with a voice.” The second reason is to “prevent lung cancer victims from remaining clueless. If you or a family member has been recently diagnosed with lung cancer, it is imperative that you test your home for radon.” The website maintains that “One in five people diagnosed with lung cancer have never smoked.”

From Radon Today a huge thank you to Liz Hoffmann, Governor Tim Pawlenty, Senator Linda Higgins and Representative Kim Norton. Let's hope that other states follow this path. Quickly.

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Minnesota Vikings

When I first started writing Radon Today the biggest challenge was finding enough radon news to even fill my little “radon lite” publication. Fortunately that hasn't been a problem for awhile and in fact, because awareness is at an all time high, the challenge is now to bring only the biggest and most interesting stories

It is true that sometimes the “awareness” of radon is wrong. For instance one radon company got a call from an elderly woman who had learned about radon and

Lincoln Would Like It

On the “more good news” front, in August 2007, Illinois Governor Rod R. Blagojevich signed a bill (The Radon Awareness Act) into law which went into effect January 1, 2008.

The law states that “At the point of sale of a house, the buyer must be notified that the property may present exposure to dangerous levels of indoor radon gas that may place the occupants at risk of developing radon-induced lung cancer. A warning statement must be

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The advertisement features two air filtration units: a large black rectangular unit on wheels and a smaller purple cylindrical unit. A circular seal with a red border and blue center contains the text 'kills up to 100% of airborne microorganisms' and 'ADVANCED AIR PURIFICATION SYSTEM' around the perimeter. The background shows a bright room with a window and a table.

Continued from page 2

included, ‘Radon, a Class A human carcinogen, is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and the second leading cause overall.’ “

Also, “The seller must provide the buyer with any information on radon test results showing elevated levels of radon. A statement from the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) must be included that strongly recommends that all homebuyers have an indoor radon test performed prior to purchase or taking occupancy and mitigation performed if high levels are found. A pamphlet entitled ‘Radon Testing Guidelines for Real Estate Transactions’ prepared by IEMA must be given to the buyer by the seller.”

The passage of this law was achieved through the hard work and dedication of many people working for and with several organizations; chief among them are Illinois state representative Dan Reitz, John Dunn the executive director of the Illinois Home Inspectors Association, and members of both the Mid-West chapter of the American Society of Radon Scientists and Technologists (AARST) and the American Lung Association. Also, a very special thank you to consumer advocate Gloria Linnertz.

Gloria Linnertz has a painful motivation to fight the good fight against radon; she lost her husband Joe to radon-induced lung cancer. She has channeled her grief into protecting others. One of the ways she has done this is by mailing over 3,000 letters to newspaper editors around the country raising awareness about radon and lung cancer. In September 2007 Gloria was elected to the board of directors at AARST. She is the first non-AARST member to be so elected.

Great job everyone.

Citing Irish

Back in our Fall/Winter 2006 issue we reported that the District Court in Ennis, Ireland convicted three employers for “failure to comply with a Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) direction to measure radon in their workplace.”

The case occurred because the RPII (the responsible authority) was following through on The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 which “requires employers to identify hazards in the workplace, assess the risk to health and safety from these hazards and put in place measures to eliminate or reduce the risk.” The mandate specifies that “all indoor workplaces in High Radon Areas must have radon measurements carried out in all ground-floor workplaces...and levels reduced if they exceed the values laid down in legislation.”

Now Ireland measures its radon in becquerels per cubic meter (Bq/m³) whereas we measure ours in picocuries per liter (pCi/L). The national “Reference Level” for radon in the workplace in Ireland is 400 Bq/m³ which would be 10.8 pCi/L here in the states.

Ireland takes its radon very seriously. Dr. Ann McGarry, Chief Executive of the RPII has been quoted as saying that “Radon is the second biggest cause of lung cancer in Ireland...It is irresponsible of employers and homeowners not to ensure that radon levels are within the acceptable limits. The message is clear: measure radon in your home and workplace and fix the problem if the levels are high; you don’t have to live or work with the risk.” And thank god that’s true for the employees at one of the offices of The Corkman Newspaper in Mallow, County Cork.

On September 20th, during testing at one of this newspaper’s offices, the RPII found an average level of 25,500 Bq/m³. This is “the second highest level of radon gas ever found in Ireland and the highest ever found in a workplace. The level detected is over 60 times higher than the acceptable limit and it is estimated that working eight hours a day in the office would be equivalent to receiving 39 chest X-rays per day or nearly 10,000 chest X-rays in a working year.” Wow, talk about news hot off the press.

Dr. McGarry said, “I commend The Corkman Newspaper for their (sic) proactive approach in ensuring their (sic) employees are protected from radon; all other employers should follow their (sic) example.” Yeah, maybe other countries too. Go Ireland.



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Condensation Bypass

The moist air in a radon system can condense in the system piping if exposed to cold temperatures that will chill the air below its dewpoint. You must properly design your systems to accommodate this moisture or you will be sure to have problems with the operation and service life of the system.

In general, condensation in the piping system is dealt with by providing a path to drain back any water in the system to a suction point so that the water can then dissipate into the soil. Care must be taken in the design to avoid creating a water trap in

the piping. Also, the pipe must have adequate pitch to ensure that condensation in the pipe will follow gravity downward. If the pipe does not have adequate pitch then water can be suspended in the pipe by friction with the air. Suspended water can cause gurgling noises, as well as, launch drops of water into the air-stream that can cause water to accumulate inside the fan unit.

A condensate bypass is essential to protect the fan unit from too much condensation. Water produced in the piping above the fan is the number one cause of failure. You can construct your own condensate bypass with fittings and tubing, as shown, or there are commercially available bypass kits available (See 2007 RadonAway catalog page 21).

Prevent callbacks, increase customer satisfaction and increase profits by ensuring your systems are properly designed to handle condensation and always install a condensation bypass to minimize system failures.

