

IMPORTANT NEWS



Opportunity knocks! 2001 showcase home needs radon system

The showcase home for the Huntsville/Madison County Builders Association's 2001 Parade of Homes is about to be built. Last year, the Alabama Radon Education Program provided the installation of a radon system for the 2000 Parade of Homes Showcase Home. It was a marketing and media success! The Alabama Radon Program would like to not only repeat that experience, but improve upon it. Any certified radon mitigation provider who is interested may participate in the installation of a RRNC passive radon system in the 2001 showcase home.

"I will get the system parts," notes Sabrina Lyle, Radon Agent Assistant with the Alabama Radon Program. "All I ask from you is some time and effort as a certified radon mitigation volunteer. This

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The 2000 Parade of Homes Showcase Home was built RRNC.

Mitigator Training Course participants

An evaluation sheet for the Mitigator Training Course is enclosed. Please take a few minutes to fill it out and send it back. We would appreciate your comments. (Send to Susan Roberts, 212A Extension Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849-5647.)



Upcoming Events...

- Sept. 19 Alabama Radon In-Service Training Meeting
- Oct. 14-20 National Radon Action Week
- Oct. 14-21 Huntsville 2001 Parade of Homes
- Oct. 21-24 National Radon Meeting, Daytona Beach, Fla.

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Mitigators — The Missing Link!

Congratulations to the Certified Radon Mitigators of North Alabama who have completed their training and made a commitment to serve the citizens of Alabama. Having Alabama-based Radon Service Providers is a big step toward empowering Alabama citizens to reduce radon levels in their homes and the serious health risk associated with those levels.

Until recently, the Alabama Radon Program has been actively encouraging citizens to test their homes for radon. Those with elevated radon levels (greater than or equal to 4 pCi/l) were encouraged to have their homes mitigated, but Alabama was in short supply of mitigators. Realizing there was a "missing link" in the program, we did something about it. Now it's up to you, as certified mitigators, to help us improve the health and quality of life for the citizens of Alabama.

Because our goals are the same — increase awareness, increase testing and increase homes mitigated — we have become partners. As we continue to promote radon testing, the market for homes needing mitigation will continue to rise. Because radon is a solvable problem and you are the link that can provide the solution, we can work together for the citizens of Alabama.

As partners, we can support you with educational tools, radon awareness programs, test kits and technical assistance. But our service is also to the Alabama citizens, providing them with radon awareness information, literature, technical assistance and testing devices; but just as important, we provide them with solutions to the radon problem — you! We offer citizens a list of Alabama certified Radon Mitigation Technicians upon request.* Although we can't make recommendations of any one Radon Service Provider over another, we can recommend those who are certified.** It will be up to you, as a business, to provide a service in the most equitable, efficient method possible. It will be your ability, reputation, service, price, and marketing ability that will determine your success. Because of our partnership, your success will bring us success in reducing elevated radon levels in the homes and lives of the citizens of Alabama!

*Also available on the Radon in Alabama Web site, www.aces.edu/radon **Certification by the National Radon Proficiency Program and EPA Radon Mitigation Standards.



Become a Builders Association member

The Huntsville/Madison County Builders Association has invited all Radon Professional Service Providers to become members of the Association.

"This is a great opportunity to grow with Madison County and become part of an active organization with shared goals in the growth of this community," notes Sabrina Lyle, Radon Agent Assistant with the Alabama Radon Program. "As a member of the H/MCBA, Radon Service Providers will have the opportunity to be recognized as a viable entity within the building industry. As a member, you will increase your contacts in the building industry. You will be listed as a reference in the directory listing for area builders and will receive information about upcoming activities."

As Madison County's program representative, Ms. Lyle has committed to building the program's partnership with the Association by becoming a member of the Association. As a member, Ms. Lyle hopes to offer input into the educational aspects of radon — as an industry and as an environmental health issue — and incorporate radon-resistant new construction in the building and construction industry.

For information on H/MCBA membership, call (256) 536-2602.

Jill Heffernan is Someone You Should Know

By Sabrina Lyle

Since radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in this country today, it is an important health issue. The public must know about radon and how it can affect its

health and quality of life. Because Alabama has no regulations pertaining to radon, education is the key to making people aware, especially to those thinking of buying, selling or building a home.

Jill Heffernan has managed to juggle a family and the responsibilities of being a Realtor for nine years. She has been a Realtor with Century 21, Steele & Associates in Madison for the past two years. She has been a resident of Madison for two years, moving here from Seattle, Wash.

I met Jill almost two years ago. At the time, I was new to my job and she



Jill Heffernan
Realtor

was new to the area. She called me at the Madison County Extension office with questions about Radon-Resistant New Construction (RRNC), since she and her family were about to have a new home built.

Jill has been a strong supporter of the Radon Education Program, both as a Realtor and as a citizen. She has been a strong advocate for educating people about radon through the Mom's Club of Madison (she is a founding member and former vice president), her job as a Realtor and as a homeowner. Since she has played an important part in helping to spread the message about radon, Jill is someone you should know.

Question: When did you first learn about radon?

Answer: When we planned our move from Seattle, we searched the Web site for the EPA Web site. When we learned about radon statistics from the Web site, we were shocked to find that Alabama was a hot spot!

Question: What do you think is your greatest success regarding radon?

Answer: My greatest success is when I

sold a home in Monrovia to an out-of-towner. I suggested that the client should conduct a radon test. At first they thought it was unnecessary, but they did agree after my urging. Because I was the one present for the inspection, I felt bad that the test would increase their bill by \$100. However, when the test revealed an average of 32.0 pCi/l, I felt I had done the right thing!

Question: What has been your greatest frustration regarding radon?

Answer: The lack of seriousness of the issue. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. I especially feel that children are at the most risk because of their small stature.

Question: What are the challenges of informing the buyer/seller of radon in the real estate transaction?

Answer: Most are completely unaware of radon or they feel that it is only present in older homes. Since I am well versed on the subject, it is easy for me to explain what radon is and how it is able to be remedied — it is not a deal

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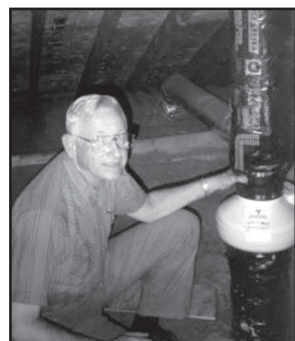
Morgan County homeowner takes action against Radon

Internet search aides homeowner's mitigation

By Donald Steele

During the 1970s, when we lived in Southwest Decatur, I heard rumors of high radon levels in parts of Alabama. However, I was not concerned enough to run a test. I moved to Friendswood, Texas in 1980 and out of curiosity ran a short-term test on our house there. The results, as I expected, were very low.

In 1995 we moved back to Alabama and purchased a house in Trinity. From the time we moved, I had intended to conduct a test for radon, but I never remembered to pick up a test kit. One day in 2001 I was in the right place at the right time and purchased a short-term test kit off the shelf of a building supply store.



Donald Steele, a Morgan County homeowner, installed his own mitigation system.

When the test results came back at 82.1 pCi/l, I didn't believe it. I thought I had purchased a defective kit. I immediately purchased another brand short-term test kit from a different store. These results came back at 86.3 pCi/l. I knew it was time for action.

I went to the Internet and found a wealth of information, including the telephone number for the Alabama Department of Public Health. When

I called the number and explained my situation, Jim McNees gave me a lot of good information. He told me what had to be done to fix my home and told me about a radon mitigation class being conducted in Huntsville. Mr. McNees directed me to the radon agent in Madison County, Sabrina Lyle, for information on the mitigation class. I had several telephone conversations with Sabrina over the next few days. She was very helpful and encouraging with her information. However, the date of the class was outside my self-imposed deadline for remedying the problem, so I purchased a "How-To" book off the Internet. The book was very informative and, being an avid "Do-it-Yourself" person, I installed the system myself. My post mitigation test was less than 0.3 pCi/l.

I attended the Home Show in Huntsville on March 2, where I met Sabrina. She encouraged me to enroll in the Radon Mitigation Class being conducted in Huntsville the week of March 26-30. I showed up the day of the class and there was a last minute cancellation; I was enrolled in the class and have passed the NEHA certified professional mitigator's exam. I found the class very interesting, challenging and informative. I have used the knowledge I gained to inform and educate my neighbors, six of whom have received test results ranging from 45 to 90 pCi/l. Some of them are in the process of installing mitigation equipment. I intend to continue to press my neighbors to conduct tests on their homes and to be as helpful to them as possible.

What is karst and what does it mean to a mitigator?

Karst is a geological term that describes the permeable soil, subsoil and bedrock that are easily penetrated and eroded by water. The erosion creates caves, cracks, fissures and other related geological features. These features have a unique impact on the speed and ease by which radon gas moves to the earth's surface and ultimately into homes on that surface.

Where is karst in Alabama?

North Alabama is part of a unique geological area called the Chattanooga Shale Shelf. The Chattanooga Shale Shelf is rich in uranium, of which radon gas is a decay product. There are approximately 3,900 caves in North Alabama. Alabama counties included in this region are Madison, Morgan, Lauderdale, Colbert, Jackson and Limestone.

How does karst affect testing for radon?

Radon gas movement is unpredictable in karst areas — radon can move so rapidly and levels are so variable in a karst area that there are different standards of testing to increase the reliability of the measurement of the actual human exposure levels. The weather can cause fluctuations in radon levels due to fluctuations in the barometric pressure. Consistently warm or cold weather may lessen the fluctuations in radon but should not necessarily be considered representative of a yearlong average. It is for this reason that the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4, has formulated a set of testing recommendations designed to improve the reliability of radon test results

and the action taken based on those test results.*

In Alabama, we recommend a long-term and a short-term test in karst areas. A short-term test done in conjunction with the long-term test can detect homes with excessively elevated levels of radon. If the short-term test is above 10 pCi/l, then a second confirmatory short-term test is recommended within a month. If the second short-term test is also above 10 pCi/l, the homeowner should consider immediate mitigation.

How do you mitigate a home in a karst area?

What makes mitigating a challenge is the dramatic increase in the unpredictability of radon gas. A home can have many sources of radon entry, either from diffusion or any number of highly localized points of entry. This unpredictability may require more extensive and intensive diagnostic procedures to define and design the most effective and successful radon system. The first step to a successful mitigation in a karst area is having good communication under the slab in the diagnostics of a subslab active soil depressurization system. It is essential to insure that all possible localized entry points of radon have good communication with the suction point. Only by assuring that all entry points will be subject to unimpeded suction from the system can you be confident that the radon problem will be mitigated.

**See EPA recommendations for karst area testing in box at right.*

EPA recommendations for Karst area testing

- Yearlong radon testing is recommended in karst areas. If the result of yearlong testing equals or exceeds 4 pCi/l, the structure should be mitigated and the mitigation confirmed with another yearlong test.
- Periodic yearlong retesting is recommended for both mitigated and unmitigated structures in this karst area in light of its continually changing subsurface formations.
- Short-term testing in karst areas is not as reliable as yearlong testing and should be discouraged. However, if a person has conducted a short-term test in these karst areas and seeks advice concerning the results, he/she should be advised of the following:
 1. Radon levels can be extremely variable in karst areas and short-term test results may not be indicative of the long-term average.
 2. Yearlong follow-up testing is recommended even if a short-term test has indicated acceptable indoor radon levels.
 3. If he/she chooses to mitigate based on the results of a short-term test, a yearlong post-mitigation test is important to confirm that the mitigation system is successful.

Showcase Home *(continued from Page 1)*

system, like last year's, will be donated at no cost to the builder or future homeowner." Persons interested should contact Ms. Lyle at (256) 532-1578, Ext. 11.

"The publicity and contacts will be invaluable to anyone who participates," said Ms. Lyle.

The showcase home is being built in the Highland Lakes Subdivision, located off Slaughter Road, near Hwy. 72 West.

"I have spoken to the builder and administrators at the H/MCBA and we have the go-ahead for the project," notes Ms. Lyle. "Time is getting close and we want to get involved before the foundation or the sub-flooring is laid. I will coordinate and work with anyone who wants to be involved in this project. We can work out flexible work schedules for all, but let me know that you're interested as soon as possible!"

"It is an exciting opportunity to do something positive for the industry, the public and the future homeowner."

Heffernan *(continued from Page 2)*

killer. In fact, if your home has a system installed, what a selling point that is! And then those homes are much healthier because of the filtration system — a help for those allergy sufferers.

Question: Do you discuss radon with home sellers? How often, in your experience, do sellers have their homes tested in preparation for selling their homes?

Answer: Because Alabama Real Estate does not require this test, sellers rarely test their homes for radon. As we are all more educated, more homes may be tested.

Question: Do you discuss radon with home buyers? How often, in your experience, do buyers request a radon test as part of the real estate contract? What has been done when the test results were over 4 pCi/l? Has the radon testing

delayed any of your transactions?

Answer: Yes, I discuss it with home buyers. Most of my transitions have a radon test as part of the inspection. I have had only one experience with a test being higher than 4 pCi/l. No, it did not delay the transaction; the system was installed in four days.

Question: What advice could you offer to other Realtors regarding the radon disclosure in real estate transactions?

Answer: It is strictly up to the agent since it is not required as part of the transaction. But I feel that it is my job to inform my buyers about radon — their health may depend on it. If I treat all of the transactions as if I were the buyer, what would I like to know?

Jill Heffernan is a Century 21 Realtor with Steele & Associates, 7169 Hwy. 72W, Suite F, Madison, AL 35758, Ph. (256) 694-2503.

Rewards for Reporting



The Alabama Radon Education program can use your help! We would like to know the impact that the Radon Education Program has had on the Real Estate industry of Alabama.

Realtors — We would like to know how many transactions involve radon testing and the actions taken as a result of the test outcome.

Builders — We would like to know how many homes are being built RRNC. Who recommended or requested RRNC?

Mitigators — We would like to know how many homes are being mitigated.

Inspectors — We would like to know how many home buyers ask for radon testing or did you, as the inspector, recommend radon testing as part of your comprehensive inspection service?

Volunteer help: We can also use volunteer help to spread the radon message to Alabama citizens — test for radon and take action when elevated radon levels are indicated. Volunteer help can be time invested or contacts made for the program. A volunteer can help by setting up speaking engagements for our Radon Team agents, helping with exhibits, home shows, speaking programs, etc. Please contact your local county Extension agent if you would like to help.

We have created several report forms for builders, mitigators and volunteers to fill out and send to us each quarter. (We have just started talking to Realtors and Inspectors and will create a form in the near future.) This information can tell us how effective we have been at getting the message to the public. Being able to identify what is working in our program is the key to outreach.

Partner Rewards: For filling out report forms and sending them to the Radon Program office, we will recognize and reward several partners in each issue of the *Partnership Connection*. We will highlight those partners, complete with photos and contact information. They will also be presented with a special Radon Education Program Partner certificate.

Program welcomes new partners

We really are proud of the new Alabama Certified Mitigators and welcome them as partners to the Alabama Radon Education and Awareness Program. The mitigators made front-page news in the *Radon in Alabama* newsletter for January-March 2001. The publication is the program's quarterly report to the program's grantors, the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4, and Alabama Department of Public Health. (If you did not receive this issue and would like to, please contact Susan Roberts at (334) 844-3686.)

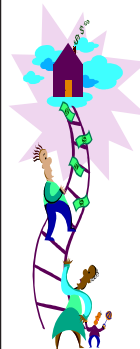


This is the first issue of the *Partnership Connection* newsletter. Our goal is to improve communication and keep our partners informed about what the Alabama Radon Program is accomplishing, both statewide and nationally. We welcome any input you might have. Contact Susan or Sabrina with suggestions, comments or questions.



Please take the time to fill out your Mitigation and RRNC Reporting Forms. This will help our program report the success of radon testing, mitigating and RRNC in the state of Alabama. If you need more forms, please call Susan Roberts at 334-844-3686 at Auburn.

Extension Support



We have extra copies of the National Association of Home Builders video, "Radon Doesn't Have to Be a Problem." Call Susan Roberts at (334) 844-3686 if you would like a copy.

Remember to purchase your radon test kits from your county Extension office. Tell prospective customers they can purchase their kits at the county Extension office or from the Radon in Alabama Web site: www.aces.edu/radon.

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