



Radon Risk Reduction Authorization Bill

by Jane Malone

Introduction

After several years of protecting EPA radon programs from budget cuts, AARST has decided to take on the challenge of strategically revamping federal radon policy to meet broader key targets. We introduced this plan during the widely successful Bill Convention at the Symposium in Myrtle Beach. This paper provides a closer look at why, what and how.

Background

Radon risk reduction represents an enormous public health opportunity in protecting occupants from indoor exposure to radioactivity. Lung cancer's health care and human costs, including lost work days and wages, exceed a million dollars per case. Radon control also presents business challenges and opportunities. Financial institutions and underwriters, risk management companies, home builders, real estate and home inspection professionals, virtually all who touch a building, note, deed, or related instrument as part of their business line, need the security of precluding radon risk before liability for occupant exposure comes back at them. At the other end of the spectrum, Main Street has a stake in radon since the radon professional sector consists mostly of small businesses and self-employed individuals, presently as many as 5,000 US workers, a number that might grow given stimulus from other sectors.

Radon Risk Reduction Is a Public-Private Partnership

The overall structure of the radon risk reduction movement involves an array of entities. The federal government, most notably through EPA, provided the original framework for baseline research, standards and proficiency and maintains vital resources such as fundamental publications and the laboratory-based radon reference. State radon programs deliver place-specific licensing requirements and EPA-funded education and outreach. States play a vital role in marshaling local health departments, state agencies, and others to communicate that radon is a serious health risk. A few states have implemented mandatory radon control in new homes and/or aggressive home buyer warning. Private sector non-profit organizations have taken responsibility for authoring standards and managing two EPA-approved proficiency programs to ensure quality services and consumer protection. Radon testing and mitigation services are performed by radon professionals, many of whom are certified by proficiency programs and/or possess state licenses.

Protections Are Insufficient

Since the 1988 enactment of the Indoor Radon Abatement Act (PL 100-551) and radon-related provisions within the 1988 McKinney Act Amendments (PL 100-628), there have been several important efforts to

protect families in the US from radon, but progress has been woefully insufficient.

A few indicators of the dimensions of the problem:

- Each year, 4.5 million existing single-family homes are sold but buyers in only a few states are testing for radon.
Only one of 3,000 US counties makes a radon test is mandatory for home sales
In 9 states, buyers receive a warning that suggests they test for radon
- Annually, less than 20% of newly constructed 400,000 single-family homes have radon-resistant protections
- Multifamily housing is tested for radon, but only when the property undergoes substantial refinancing.
- One out of every three states has functional oversight of radon service providers to assure that they are properly qualified to do the specialized work of mitigating radon gas entry and testing radioactivity levels
- 33 states have no oversight
- Since EPA's last publication of radon zone predictions, radon test results hundreds of counties indicate that the radon risk classification is higher than the zone map predicts.
- Over 70,000 school classrooms are estimated to exceed the EPA action level, however, there is no plan, strategy or funding to locate and remediate this radioactivity in the schoolhouse or classroom.
- The majority of the radon related deaths occur below the EPA's radon action level of 4 pCi/L.

Continued Federal Leadership Needed

The 1988 federal radon law set the table for national action and stimulated early infrastructure. Federal leadership, through congressional appropriations report language and executive branch action such as the Federal Radon Action Plans, has delivered important assets in the ensuing 30 years. However, progress to end radon-induced lung cancer has been minimal. As the national voice of radon professionals and private sector partner to EPA, AARST seeks continued federal leadership to fortify the public sector side of the business of radon risk reduction in the US.

There are three major components of AARST's concept for greater federal action: Delivering Basic Citizen Protections, Solidifying 21st Century Radon Infrastructure and Stimulating State and Local Leadership.