

What to Look for in a Radon Mitigation Contractor for Your Home

When I bought my first house in St. Louis, radon was the last thing on my mind. I had checked for lead paint, knob-and-tube wiring, and the age of the roof. But during the home inspection, the radon test came back at 6.8 picocuries per liter, well above the EPA action level of 4.0. That number forced me to learn more about radon gas and what it takes to get rid of it. The single most important decision I made was choosing the right radon mitigation contractor. That choice determines whether your system actually works or just gives you false peace of mind.

Why Radon Mitigation Is Not a DIY Job

Some homeowners assume that radon mitigation is just a matter of sealing cracks in the basement floor or running a pipe outside. In reality, radon gas moves through soil and enters a house through pressure differentials, cracks, sump openings, and the porous concrete itself. Sealing alone rarely solves the problem. A proper mitigation system usually relies on sub-slab depressurization or soil suction to draw radon from beneath the foundation and vent it safely above the roofline. This requires understanding the soil type, the foundation layout, and how the house breathes. A skilled professional brings experience that a weekend warrior simply cannot match.



I learned this the hard way. My first attempt at mitigation involved buying a fan and some PVC piping from a big-box store. I installed a crude system in my crawl space, fired it up, and waited. The manometer showed negative pressure, so I thought I had won. A follow-up radon test told a different story, levels had barely budged. That is when I called Air Sense Environmental, a St. Louis company that specializes in radon mitigation. The technician found that my suction point was placed over a buried rock ledge, not the soil. The system was pulling air from a void, not from under the slab. A real professional would have known to test the sub-slab communication first.

What a Qualified Radon Mitigation Contractor Brings

A reliable [radon mitigation contractor](#) starts with proper radon testing. Not the short-term kit you buy at the hardware store and send off to a lab, but a precise measurement that establishes baseline levels. In my case, Air Sense Environmental used a continuous radon monitor that logged hourly readings for 48 hours. That gave them a clear picture of fluctuations caused by weather, barometric pressure, and HVAC cycling. Without that data, designing a system is guesswork.

Next comes the system design. For a house with a basement, sub-slab depressurization is the standard approach. The contractor drills a hole through the basement floor, excavates a small pit, and inserts a section of PVC piping that connects to a fan installed outside or in the attic. The fan creates negative pressure under the slab, pulling radon-laden soil gas away before it can enter the living space. The piping runs up the side of the house or through interior walls, terminating above the roofline. Sealing all visible cracks and openings in the basement floor and walls is an important step, but it works best as a complement to active soil suction, not as a standalone fix.

A good contractor also pays attention to details like the manometer. This simple gauge sits on the pipe inside the basement and shows whether the fan is maintaining negative pressure. If the manometer reads zero, something is wrong, the fan may be failing, the pipe may be blocked, or the system may have a leak. A professional will install the manometer in a visible spot and show you how to read it. They will also explain that the system needs periodic checks, especially after heavy rain or snowmelt, when soil moisture can affect suction performance.

Post-Installation Verification: The Non-Negotiable Step

One of the best indicators of a thorough radon mitigation contractor is insistence on post-installation verification. After the system is running, the contractor should place a radon detector in the lowest livable area of the home, typically the basement, and let it run for at least 48 hours, ideally longer. Some use activated carbon test kits that are sent to a lab for analysis, but continuous radon monitors provide real-time data that can reveal short-term spikes. The goal is to confirm that the mitigation system has brought radon levels below 4.0 pCi/L, and preferably below 2.0. Air Sense Environmental includes this verification as part of their standard process, and they do not consider the job complete until the numbers prove the system works.

Skipping post-installation verification is like taking medicine without checking if your fever broke. I have heard stories of homeowners who paid for a system and later discovered that levels were still high because the fan was undersized or the suction point was misplaced. A verified system gives you documented proof that the investment paid off, which also matters if you ever sell the house. Buyers and their agents increasingly ask for radon test results, and a clean report from a verified system can be a strong selling point.



Red Flags When Hiring

Not every company that offers radon mitigation does it well. Here are some warning signs I have picked up from my own experience and from talking to neighbors in St. Louis:

- Contractors who quote a price over the phone without seeing your house. Every home is different, and a proper quote requires a site visit.
- Companies that downplay radon testing or suggest you skip it. Accurate testing is the foundation of any effective system.
- Installers who do not carry liability insurance or proper licensing. Radon mitigation involves electrical work for the fan and structural modifications to the foundation.
- Contractors who guarantee a specific radon level without doing any verification. Anyone can promise low numbers; the proof is in the post-installation test.
- Firms that use outdated methods like passive venting without a fan. In most homes, passive systems are far less reliable than active soil suction.

The Long-Term View

Radon mitigation is not a set-it-and-forget-it solution. Fans wear out after five to ten years, depending on the model and how hard it runs. Manometers can fog over or get bumped. Pipes can be damaged by lawn equipment or settling ground. A radon mitigation contractor who offers a warranty and is available for follow-up service is worth the extra cost. I replaced my fan after eight years, and the continuous radon monitor in my basement showed levels creeping back up before the fan failed completely. Because I had a relationship with a local company, they came out the same week and swapped the unit.

St. Louis is in an area where radon is a real concern. The EPA has mapped much of the region as Zone 1, meaning predicted average indoor levels exceed the action level. That does not mean every house has a problem, but it does mean testing is cheap insurance. If a test shows elevated levels, a properly designed and installed mitigation system can reduce your exposure dramatically. The key is finding a contractor who treats radon mitigation as a science, not a side job.

Looking back, my biggest mistake was trying to shortcut the process. I wasted money on materials, lost weeks of time, and ended up hiring a professional anyway. The radon mitigation contractor I eventually chose did not just install hardware, they explained the principles of sub-slab depressurization, showed me how to read the manometer, and came back to verify the results. That level of care is what separates a real solution from a temporary fix.

If you live in a house with a basement or crawl space, and especially if you spend time in the lower levels, take radon seriously. Test your home. If the numbers are high, call a qualified radon mitigation contractor. Ask about their testing process, their system design, and their

post-installation verification. A good contractor will welcome those questions. A bad one will avoid them. Your health and your family's safety depend on making the right choice.