

Why Radon Mitigation Before Closing Makes Sense for St. Louis Home Buyers

When you are buying a home in St. Louis, the inspection period can feel like a blur of foundation cracks, HVAC checks, and roof assessments. One item that sometimes slips through the cracks - literally - is radon. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that seeps into basements and crawl spaces through soil and foundation openings. It is odorless, invisible, and can pose a health risk over time. If a radon test shows a level at or above the EPA's action level of 4.0 pCi/L, you suddenly face a decision: walk away, ask for a credit, or insist on a fix. That is where planning for radon mitigation before closing can save time, money, and a lot of last-minute stress.

In my years working with home buyers and sellers in the St. Louis area, I have seen the same scenario play out more times than I can count. A buyer falls in love with a house, the home inspection goes fine, and then the radon test comes back at 6.2 pCi/L. Suddenly the closing date is two weeks away and everyone is scrambling. The buyer wants the seller to install a radon mitigation system, but nobody has budgeted for it or considered the timeline. The seller feels blindsided, the buyer worries about delays, and the real estate agent tries to keep the deal together. This is exactly why talking about radon mitigation before closing - and including it as a buyer contingency in the offer - can turn a potential deal-breaker into a manageable step.

The Radon Reality in St. Louis

St. Louis sits on a geology that can produce elevated radon levels. The EPA has mapped much of the region as Zone 1, meaning predicted average indoor radon levels above the action level. That does not mean every house has a problem, but it does mean that skipping a radon test during a home purchase is a gamble. Many homes in older neighborhoods have concrete slab foundations or unfinished basements with sump pits and floor drains - classic entry points for soil gas. Even newer construction with radon resistant construction features can still have issues if the passive system was not installed correctly or the soil conditions shifted.

I once consulted on a house in the Kirkwood area that had passed a short-term radon test during the initial offer phase. The buyer, trusting the result, waived further testing. Three months after moving in, they decided to do a longer test with a continuous radon monitor and found levels averaging 8.9 pCi/L. The mitigation contractor had to install a sub-slab depressurization system, which meant cutting into a finished basement floor. That job cost nearly twice what it would have if done before the basement was finished. That experience taught me that a single short-term radon test is a snapshot, not the full story. A continuous

radon monitor, or CRM, gives you a running average over a few days and can catch spikes that a one-time test might miss.

Making Radon a Standard Part of the Closing Process

Smart buyers in St. Louis now treat radon testing like a home inspection: a standard contingency that happens during the due diligence period. If the radon level comes back high, the buyer can request that the seller install a radon mitigation system before closing. This is where the phrase "[radon mitigation before closing](#)" becomes a practical goal rather than a wish. It means the work gets done, paid for, and verified before the keys change hands. That verification step is critical. I have seen sellers agree to install a system but then cut corners - a passive vent instead of an active fan, or a system that does not drop the radon level below the action level. A post-mitigation test using a CRM confirms the fix actually works.

The timeline for radon mitigation before closing depends on the house and the contractor. A typical radon mitigation system for a basement with a sump pit can be installed in a day. The contractor drills a small hole through the concrete floor, creates a suction point under the slab, and runs a pipe with an inline fan to the outside. The fan runs continuously, drawing soil gas away from the house and venting it above the roofline. This system usually costs between \$800 and \$1,500 in the St. Louis market. If the house has a crawl space, the approach is different but still straightforward. The key is that the work can happen fast if everyone is prepared. The bottleneck is almost always the lack of a plan, not the work itself.

How to Build Radon Mitigation Into Your Offer

If you are a buyer, talk to your real estate agent about adding a radon contingency to your offer. The language should say that the buyer has the right to a radon test within a certain number of days, and that if the radon level equals or exceeds the EPA action level, the seller will pay for radon mitigation before closing. Some sellers will push back, arguing that radon is a natural phenomenon and not their responsibility. In a balanced market, that may be a hill the buyer chooses not to die on. But in most cases, reasonable sellers understand that a healthy house sells faster. If the seller prefers to handle the mitigation themselves, they should use a licensed mitigation contractor and provide the buyer with the final test results.

For sellers, the smart move is to do a radon test before listing. If the level is high, you can install the system ahead of time and include it as a selling point. That way, the radon disclosure in your seller disclosure form shows a clean bill of health. It also removes the uncertainty from the closing process. I have seen sellers lose a deal because they waited until the buyer's test came back high and then could not agree on who pays for the fix. A proactive radon test and mitigation can be the difference between a smooth closing and a canceled contract.

Continuous Monitoring vs. Short-Term Tests

One question that comes up often is whether to use a short-term radon test or a continuous radon monitor. Short-term tests are cheap and easy, but they only measure the air for two to seven days. If the weather changes or the house's HVAC system cycles differently, the result can be misleading. A CRM, by contrast, takes readings every hour and provides a running average. It also shows when radon levels spike - for example, during a heavy rain or when the furnace kicks on. In a real estate transaction, a CRM gives both parties more confidence in the result. Companies like Air Sense Environmental in St. Louis offer CRM testing specifically for real estate transactions, which helps everyone move forward with clear data.

The CRM approach also helps with the timing of radon mitigation before closing. If the initial test shows a level of 6.0 pCi/L, the mitigation contractor can install the system, and then the buyer can run a follow-up CRM test to confirm the level dropped below the action level. That whole loop can happen in a week if the schedule is tight. I have seen it work for a closing date that was only ten days out. It took coordination between the buyer, seller, agent, mitigation contractor, and testing company, but it happened. The alternative - a delayed closing, a renegotiated price, or a lost house - is far worse.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

There are a few traps that buyers and sellers fall into when dealing with radon. One is assuming that a low short-term test result means the house is safe forever. Radon levels can change with seasons, renovations, and soil settling. Another is thinking that a sump pump cover or a sealant alone is enough. Those measures can reduce radon, but they rarely bring a high level down to safe on their own. A properly designed radon mitigation system with an active fan is the only reliable fix for most homes. A third mistake is waiting until after closing to deal with radon. Once you own the house, the cost and hassle are all yours. That is why negotiating radon mitigation before closing is so valuable - it keeps the financial responsibility with the seller, where it belongs when the problem existed before the sale.

Foundation cracks are another source of confusion. Not every crack in a basement floor leaks radon, but many do. A good home inspection will note cracks and gaps, but the inspector is not a radon expert. If the radon test comes back high, a mitigation contractor will evaluate the foundation and the soil conditions to design the system. They may also seal obvious openings as part of the installation. But sealing alone, without active ventilation, is rarely enough.

Radon resistant construction in new homes is becoming more common in St. Louis. Builders often install a layer of gravel under the slab, a vapor barrier, and a passive vent pipe that runs to the roof. In theory, that passive system works if the soil pressure and air flow are right. In practice, many passive systems never get activated with a fan. If you buy a new home with a

passive system, ask the builder to test the radon level and to install a fan if needed. It is much cheaper to add the fan during construction than after the house is finished.

Final Thoughts on Radon and Real Estate

Radon is not a reason to panic, but it is a reason to plan. In the St. Louis market, where radon levels can be unpredictable, making radon testing and mitigation a standard part of the closing process protects everyone. Buyers get a safe home and avoid surprise expenses. Sellers get a clean sale and limit their liability. Real estate agents get a smoother transaction with fewer last-minute renegotiations. The key is to treat radon like any other material defect - test for it, disclose what you find, and fix it early.

If you are in the middle of a home purchase right now, do not wait until the week before closing to think about radon. Ask your agent about adding a radon contingency. Schedule a test with a qualified company that uses a continuous radon monitor. And if the level comes back high, negotiate for radon mitigation before closing. It is one of those steps that feels like extra hassle in the moment but saves you from a much bigger headache later. A little foresight now means a healthier home and a closing that actually closes.