

Why a Real Estate Radon Test Matters in St. Louis Transactions

When you buy or sell a home in St. Louis, the list of inspections and disclosures can feel endless. You have the home inspection, the termite check, the sewer scope. One item that sometimes gets pushed aside - or misunderstood - is the radon test. I have spent years working with radon measurement in this region, and I can tell you that skipping a real estate radon test can lead to headaches down the road. Radon is not a hypothetical risk here. The geology of the St. Louis area, with its limestone and shale, creates conditions where radon gas can seep into basements and crawlspaces. The EPA has mapped much of Missouri as Zone 1, meaning the average indoor radon level is expected to exceed the action level of 4.0 picocuries per liter. That is not a scare tactic; it is data from the Missouri Department of Health.

The Difference Between a DIY Kit and a Continuous Radon Monitor

Many sellers and buyers ask me whether they can just pick up a charcoal canister from the hardware store and call it done. You can, but you should understand what you are getting. A short-term radon test using a charcoal device gives you a single number after two to seven days. It is a snapshot. The problem is that radon levels fluctuate with weather, barometric pressure, and how the home's heating or cooling system runs. A charcoal test might catch a low reading during a week of open windows and miss the real average. A continuous radon monitor, which is what Air Sense Environmental uses, takes readings every hour or even more frequently. It builds a curve of the radon level over time. For a real estate transaction, that kind of data matters because it reduces the chance of a false low or a false high. When a seller disclosure mentions that a radon test was done, the buyer wants to know the method, not just the number.

That brings me to the phrase you will hear from agents and inspectors: [real estate radon test](#). It is not just any radon test. It is a test performed under specific conditions - closed-house conditions, usually for 48 hours minimum, with the HVAC running in normal mode. The goal is to simulate the living conditions a buyer would experience. I have seen deals stall because a seller ran a quick test with windows cracked and then had to disclose a passing result that did not hold up when the buyer's inspector repeated the measurement. A proper real estate radon test is designed to withstand scrutiny from both sides of the table.

How Radon Fits Into the Home Inspection and Buyer Contingency

Most standard home inspection contracts in Missouri do not automatically include radon testing. It is often an add-on or a separate service. That means the buyer's agent needs to

request it as a buyer contingency. If the test results come back above 4.0 pCi/L, the buyer can negotiate for a radon mitigation system to be installed. I have worked with buyers who waived the radon test to save a few hundred dollars, only to discover after closing that their finished basement had radon levels above 8.0. Retrofitting a mitigation system after the house is furnished and the family is living there is more expensive and disruptive than doing it before closing. The EPA and the Missouri Department of Health both recommend testing every home below the third floor, regardless of whether the neighbor's house tested fine. Radon does not follow property lines.

I recall a recent transaction in the St. Louis Hills neighborhood where the seller had lived in the house for thirty years and never tested. The buyer's real estate radon test came back at 6.2 pCi/L. The seller was surprised, but the data from the continuous radon monitor showed a clear pattern: levels spiked overnight when the house was closed up and dropped during the day when doors were opened. That convinced the seller that the reading was real, and they agreed to install a sub-slab depressurization system. The deal closed on time. Without that detailed data, the seller might have argued with the buyer, and the whole thing could have fallen apart.

Seller Disclosure and the Role of Radon Measurement

Missouri law does not require a seller to test for radon before listing a home. But the seller disclosure form asks if the seller knows of any radon or radon mitigation systems. If you have never tested, you answer "no" or "unknown." That is a valid answer, but it shifts the responsibility to the buyer. For a seller who wants to avoid surprises, getting a radon test done before listing can be a smart move. It gives you time to address any issues proactively. A seller who can hand a buyer a clean radon test from a reputable company like Air Sense Environmental has an advantage. It shows transparency. It also prevents the buyer from using a radon test as a last-minute negotiation tool.

The type of radon test matters for disclosure purposes. A long-term radon test, which runs for 90 days or more, gives a better picture of the annual average, but it is impractical during a fast-moving real estate transaction. That is why the short-term radon test, especially when done with a continuous monitor, is the industry standard for real estate. The continuous monitor provides hourly readings, so if the EPA action level is exceeded, you can see exactly when and for how long. That level of detail helps the radon mitigation specialist design a system that works for that specific foundation and soil condition.

What Happens When the Radon Level Is High

If a real estate radon test shows a level above 4.0, the next step is usually a consultation with a radon mitigation specialist. The most common fix for radon-affected homes in St. Louis is a

sub-slab depressurization system. That involves running a pipe from the gravel layer under the basement floor up to a fan that vents the radon gas outside. The cost is typically between \$800 and \$2,500, depending on the house size and foundation complexity. For comparison, the average cost of a radon test with a continuous monitor is around \$150 to \$300. Spending that few hundred dollars to identify a problem before closing is a bargain. I have seen buyers waive the test to save money and then face a \$3,000 mitigation bill plus the stress of a health concern.

One point that often gets lost in the conversation is that radon gas is not something you can see or smell. You cannot detect it during a walkthrough. The only way to know the radon level is through a proper radon measurement. That is why the EPA and the Missouri Department of Health both recommend testing every two years even after a mitigation system is installed, because systems can fail or the soil conditions can change.

Practical Tips for Buyers and Sellers

If you are buying or selling a home in St. Louis, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Make the radon test a buyer contingency in the contract. Do not assume it is included in the home inspection.
- Insist on a continuous radon monitor rather than a charcoal canister. The extra data is worth the cost.
- If the test comes back high, get a quote from a radon mitigation specialist before negotiating. That gives you a real number to work with.
- Sellers should consider testing before listing. A clean test is a selling point. A problem found early is easier to fix than one discovered during the buyer's inspection period.
- Keep the test results with the property records. Future buyers will appreciate the documentation.

I have seen too many transactions where radon became an issue at the last minute because someone assumed it was not a problem in their neighborhood. Radon does not care about zip codes. It moves through soil and finds paths through foundation cracks, sump pumps, and floor drains. The only way to know is to test.

Final Thoughts on Radon in Real Estate

The real estate market in St. Louis is competitive, and every contingency feels like a potential deal breaker. But a radon test is not just another checkbox. It is a health and financial safeguard. A real estate radon test done with the right equipment and under the right conditions gives both the buyer and the seller confidence. It turns an invisible risk into a

manageable piece of data. Air Sense Environmental has been doing this work in St. Louis for years, and the feedback I hear most often is that clients wish they had tested sooner. Whether you are a first-time buyer or a seasoned investor, consider radon testing a standard part of your due diligence. It is one of those rare things in a home sale that can actually prevent a problem instead of just identifying one after the fact.