



Consumer Federation of America Foundation

Radon Fix-It Program: Getting Involved

Abstract

The Radon Fix-It Program, established in 1994, is operated by the Consumer Federation of America Foundation (CFAF) in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This toll-free consumer hotline has assisted 38,000 consumers faced with mitigating homes with high levels of radon. The program provides consumers with a list of state radon contacts, lists of certified radon mitigators from private proficiency programs, EPA publications, and answers to nontechnical questions about health effects, test procedures, test results, mitigation methods and costs, and post-mitigation testing. Consumers are strongly urged to contact state radon offices regarding radon mitigation in their state. The Radon Fix-It Program also encourages consumers to hire certified contractors to mitigate high radon levels.

CFA Foundation urges the radon industry to participate in the Radon Fix-It Program. Testing companies provide consumers with a Radon Fix-It postcard or the toll-free phone number with their radon test results. Mitigation companies can assist the Radon Fix-it Program by seeking certification from private proficiency programs, thereby increasing the number of available certified mitigators that are referred to consumers by the Program. States with their own certification programs can provide updated lists of certified mitigators in their state.

The Radon Fix-It Program is an important conduit for connecting consumers to testers, certified mitigators, and government entities. Participation by the radon industry is essential in ensuring that consumers learn of this service that helps lead to true radon risk reduction -- fixing homes to prevent radon exposure.

Introduction

Risk reduction is achieved by mitigating homes with radon. The Radon Fix-It Program is designed to provide consumers who have radon test results of 4 pCi/L or higher with information and encouragement to fix their homes.

Research by CFA Foundation demonstrates that the public is appreciative of an independent, credible, private sector, noncommercial program that provides reliable referrals and demystifies radon mitigation. Consumers relate to CFA Foundation as an organization where "someone's working for me...they're us." CFA Foundation research also demonstrates that consumers contacting the Radon Fix-it Program are likely to mitigate their homes, thereby achieving risk reduction.

Consumers contact the Radon Fix-It Program either by a toll-free hotline (800-644-6999) or by the return of a postcard. Those who call the program have the option to leave their name

and mailing address to automatically receive materials from the hotline, or they may request a return phone call. For callers requesting a return phone call, an information specialist answers questions and directs consumers to sources of technical information that will help in the mitigation process.

As part of this program, participating radon testing companies and measurement providers include a prepaid postcard with test result mailings to clients with radon test results of 4 pCi/L or higher. The postcard encourages high testers (> 4 pCi/L) to contact the Radon Fix-It Program.

Each contact to the Radon Fix-It Program receives:

1. A letter from CFA Foundation strongly encouraging mitigation to protect their family's health;
2. Encouragement and a referral to contact the appropriate state radon office to get information about state specific requirements;
3. A referral to certified mitigator lists of the two privately run Radon Proficiency Programs;
4. Free publications (*Consumer's Guide to Radon Reduction*, *Home Buyer's and Seller's Guide*, and other publications based on information needed).

Trends in Radon Fix-It Contacts

The Fix-It Program collects data from those contacting the program to evaluate trends in use of the program, test results, and types of information being sought. Personally identifiable information remains confidential. An annual report summarizes trends in the aggregate data for a results report to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, which supports this service under a cooperative agreement.

The most recent annual report looks at trends in contacts to the program between March 1, 2000 and July 31, 2001.

Who contacts the program?

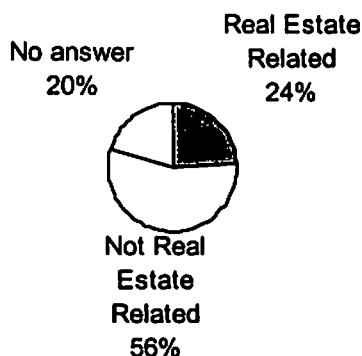
During this 17-month period, the Radon Fix-It Program responded to 7,813 consumers. Of these contacts, 6,913 called the toll-free number and 900 returned the postcard. Of the 6,913 callers, 32% requested a return call by the information specialist for more information. Of the 2,215 requests for return calls, 2,118 were completed and 97 calls (4%) were terminated when the information specialist attempted unsuccessfully three times to return the call.

Twenty-four percent of those contacting the program indicate their radon test was conducted as part of a real estate transaction. Of these real estate contacts, four times as many home buyers as home sellers called the Fix-It Program for information. Fifty-six percent of those contacting the program indicated their radon test was not performed as part of a real

estate transaction. In the remaining 20% of the cases, an answer was not provided about the connection to a real estate transaction.

Figure 1. Real Estate Contacts

**Real Estate Related Contacts
March 2000 - July 2001**



Where are the contacts from?

The Radon Fix-It Program received contacts from 49 states (excluding Hawaii). Callers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Wisconsin, Virginia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Michigan contacted the program most often. Contacts from these states were also most likely to have the highest radon test results.

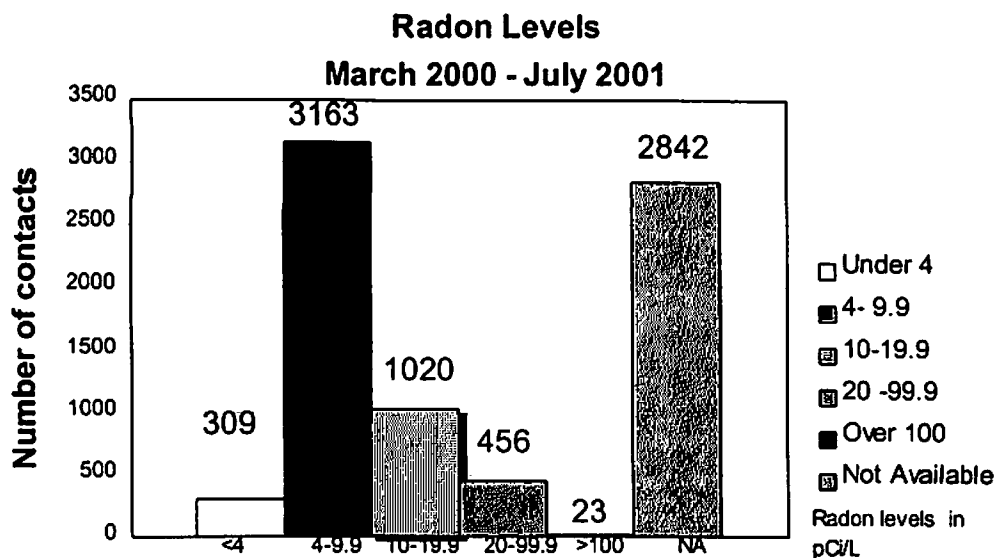
**Radon Test Results in
10 States Most Frequently Contacting Radon Fix-It Program**

State	Total Contacts	< 4 pCi/L	4 – 9.9 pCi/L	10 – 19.9 pCi/L	20 – 100 pCi/L	>100 pCi/L	Not available
PA	710	18	266	99	92	6	229
MD	652	19	255	90	44	2	242
IL	501	22	219	61	24	0	175
OH	439	18	191	63	38	1	128
NY	430	28	170	50	28	0	154
WI	380	11	179	73	15	0	102
VA	352	12	160	34	9	0	137
MA	342	15	157	39	21	1	109
MN	291	8	148	41	8	0	86
MI	286	8	145	33	8	1	91

What are their radon results?

The largest group of contacts to the program (40%) had radon results between 4 – 9.9 pCi/L. Very few contacts had results below EPA’s action level of 4 pCi/L.

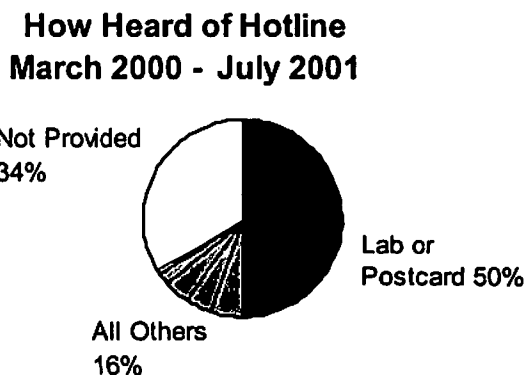
Figure 2. Radon Levels



How do they hear about the program?

Fifty percent of those contacting the Fix-it Program learned about this service through the laboratory or measurement provider issuing their radon test report. Referrals by real estate agents, home inspectors, media, the SOS Radon Hotline, and the Internet together account for less than 16% of those contacting the program. The remaining 34% of the callers did not indicate how they learned of the program.

Figure 3. Source of Referral



What types of questions are asked?

In an effort to capture the main reason for calling, the information specialist assigns the call to the one category that best describes the reason for the call. The largest number of callers asked questions about radon mitigation in connection with buying a home (30%). The ranking of the question categories is listed below:

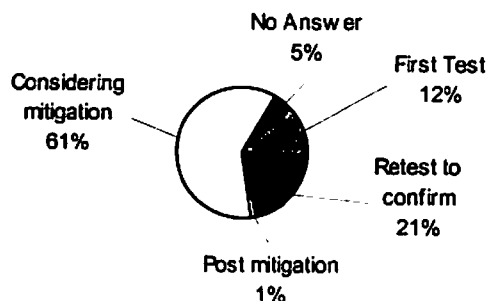
Ranking of Most Frequently Asked Question Categories

Number	Category	Percent of 2,118 Callbacks Completed
641	Buying a home	30%
320	Risk & health	15%
311	Mitigation techniques	15%
248	Selecting a mitigator	12%
177	Test validity	8%
149	Selling a home	7%
102	Cost of mitigation	5%
67	Other	3%
63	Self-mitigation	3%
40	Not Given	2%

Where are callers in the testing/mitigation process?

Thirty-three percent of those we spoke to during a return call were in the process of completing their initial radon test or completing a follow up short-term test to confirm the initial reading. Over sixty percent of those we spoke with were in the decision making process. These people were considering their alternatives including: speaking to contractors; researching self-mitigation; and gathering information on the cost, risk and benefits of mitigation. One percent were conducting post mitigation testing.

Figure 4. Testing Status
Where Callers Are in the Testing
Process
March 2000 - July 2001



What is the length of returned phone calls?

Of the 2,118 returned calls, the average length of the returned call was 3 minutes.

Getting Involved in the Radon Fix-It Program

Participation by the radon industry is essential to ensure that consumers test and mitigate to reduce high levels of radon. CFA Foundation urges testing companies, mitigation companies, state radon offices, home inspectors and real estate agents to participate in the Radon Fix-It Program.

Testing companies and measurement providers can provide consumers who test over 4 pCi/L a Radon Fix-It postcard or provide the toll-free phone number (1-800-644-6999) on radon test reports. CFA Foundation provides postage-paid reply cards free of charge for distribution. Many of the companies currently participating in the program recognize this referral as a value-added service to their customers who test above EPA's action level and who need advice and information about reducing their risk.

Mitigation companies can assist the Radon Fix-It Program by becoming certified by private radon proficiency programs. The Program encourages the use of certified mitigators and distributes lists of certified mitigators from the two private proficiency programs. If more mitigators become certified, there will be a larger pool of mitigators to choose from and consumers will have more choice. As it is now, consumers in some states have very few choices about which certified mitigator to use to reduce their risk.

Home inspectors and real estate agents are important conduits for transmitting advice and information to homeowners, buyers and sellers. Radon Fix-It Postcards and brochures *Lowering*

Radon Levels: Help for Consumers are made available at no cost for companies that want to distribute materials that will assist consumers faced with mitigating their homes.

Some state radon programs assist the Radon Fix-It Program by providing updated state-specific lists of certified mitigators for distribution by the Fix-It Program. This win-win relationship gets general information to the consumer through a national hotline while it also reinforces the importance of consumers contacting the state radon office for specific information relative to their state requirements.

With increased participation by testing companies, measurement providers, certified mitigators, home inspectors, real estate agents and state radon offices, more consumers can receive the information and encouragement to reduce radon levels in their homes, thereby achieving risk reduction.

Consumer Federation of America Foundation (CFAF) was founded in 1972 as a nonprofit organization to provide consumer education, conduct consumer-related research and to support the growth of state and local consumer organizations. CFA Foundation is affiliated with Consumer Federation of America (CFA), a nonprofit organization formed in 1968 to advance consumer interests through advocacy and education. CFA has 280 organizational members, representing 50 million consumers across the United States.