

Media Outreach

Tips

A successful media outreach approach can increase the success of your event. The following tips will help you capture media attention for your radon activity, event, or program.

Tell the radon story.

The best way to gain the media's attention is to provide facts about the dangers of radon to public health. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, second only to smoking, and radon exposure is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.

- ▶ Remember to involve the media in all radon-related activities, such as testing demonstrations and poster contests.
- ▶ Invite the media to talk with people who have tested their homes for radon and successfully mitigated the radon problem, or whose homes were built radon-resistant.
- ▶ Arrange for interviews with doctors and other respected experts and spokespeople who can discuss the dangers of radon and steps to mitigate health risks.
- ▶ Plan a press conference at an "on-the-scene" location, such as at a home that will be tested for radon to demonstrate how easy it is to test and to provide the media with a visual for publicizing the issue.

Once you have designed an interesting event, there are a few general steps you can follow to ensure that you get the best coverage possible.

Please see pages 23-24 for more specific ideas on telling the radon story in your community.

Build successful relationships with the media.

- ▶ Establish a list of national and local media, taking note of beat reporters. Beat reporters are assigned to a specific area or topic, such as community health and science.
- ▶ Contact beat reporters and editors to introduce yourself and to establish a point of contact for information.
- ▶ Think of reporters as avenues for getting radon information to the public.

Start with a good media list.

A good list is one that is relevant. In choosing whom to approach, it is important to consider who is likely to want to tell your radon story, as well as whom you would like to do it. You may want to include small newspapers and community newsletters in addition to major newspapers and television

and radio stations. While you want to cast a broad net, you do not want to waste time and resources with media outlets or reporters who are not right for the event.

At major newspapers and television and radio stations, in most cases, it is appropriate to contact the assignment desk or assignment editor. The assignment editor will usually give you the name and contact information for the beat reporter who covers topics related to radon.

In radio, you should contact the news director. Your local library may have a media guide listing names and addresses of the people you may want to contact. You can usually get this information from the Web site of the radio station as well. Be sure to get your contact's e-mail address. Many reporters prefer to get releases and other background materials by e-mail rather than hard copy.

Please see page 24 for a list of relevant media outlets to consider.

A good list is an accurate list. Once you have developed a list of potential contacts to target, double check that list for accuracy by calling the publication or station. Call the main number to make sure the person you have selected to contact is still in that position, and that the contact information you have is accurate.

Write a good pitch letter.

After you have a targeted list of reporters and editors, you'll need to write a pitch letter. The pitch letter alerts editors and reporters to your story and tells them why they should cover radon issues. Please see page 23 for tips on writing a pitch letter.

Write a press release.

A well written press release can yield more media coverage than any amount of advertising could bring to radon. Please see pages 26-27 for press release tips and a sample press release.

Write an op-ed or letter to the editor.

Publications' opinion sections are another great place to promote radon awareness. Author an op-ed describing your experience with radon and encourage others in the community to conduct radon tests. Writing an op-ed

introduces the publication's readership to radon, puts a local angle on the issue, and helps readers learn what they can do to prevent exposure to radon. If the publication has written about radon or related topics recently, you can respond to the article with a letter to the editor. Please see pages 28-29 for a sample op-ed.

Develop a media kit.

Make it as easy as possible for the media to do their jobs. Provide them with statistical information about radon from reputable sources and provide simple graphics if you have them. Anything you can do to make it easy for reporters to write a story will help. Put together a media kit with a full range of information about radon issues, testing and mitigation, radon-resistant new construction, and the specifics of your radon event. A media kit can include the following materials:

- ▶ Pitch letter
- ▶ Press release*
- ▶ Radon fact sheet*
- ▶ Radon materials order form*
- ▶ Biography or background information of speakers and experts available to talk about radon issues
- ▶ Proclamation*
- ▶ Calendar of events
- ▶ List of radon kit manufacturers and laboratories and their toll-free numbers
- ▶ List of local stores that carry radon kits, complete with contact information
- ▶ Your contact information
- ▶ State radon program contact information
- ▶ Web site addresses as appropriate

Follow up.

You've sent your materials out to the reporters and editors on your list and allowed time for them to look over the information. Now it's time to make follow-up calls. During your follow-up calls, you should:

- ▶ **Be prepared.** Make notes for your calls and be prepared to take notes during the calls. Plan what you are going to say ahead of time and stick to it. Try to anticipate any questions or objections you might hear and have an answer prepared. Always remind the media that radon is a serious health risk that is easy to overlook because it is an odorless, invisible, and tasteless killer. Also remember to send the message that radon testing and mitigation is convenient and cost-effective.
- ▶ **Be polite and brief.** Editors and reporters are usually on a very tight schedule and they will appreciate it if you get right to the point. Identify yourself, tell them why you are calling, and offer to answer any questions they may have.
- ▶ **Ask for coverage.** After you have confirmed receipt of your letter and answered any questions, ask for coverage of your event.

*Samples of these materials are included in this Event Planning Kit. Some samples are provided in MS Word and can be accessed at http://www.epa.gov/radon/nram/event_kit.html.

Remember these points.

Timing is everything. Consider the editor's schedule when you place your calls. Newspapers are usually working on a mid-afternoon deadline for the next day, so late afternoon is the best time to call. Call the staff of noon news programs after 3:00 p.m. and call the evening news in the morning.

More than one call may be required. This is especially true with television stations. Often the assignments for a given day are not made until that morning. The station's ability to send a crew to your event can be affected by other events taking place that day. If a media outlet has expressed interest in covering your event but has not committed to it, call on the day of the event and ask again for their coverage and remind them of the details.

Don't get discouraged. You are competing against other story ideas and current events. You might feel as though you are getting the run-around. It's possible that one person will tell you to speak to another or to call back at another time. If so, follow their directions. It is also possible that people will be short with you because they are busy. The best strategy is to be courteous, helpful, creative, and most of all, persistent. Remember that the media needs news to fill their programs and newspapers. Let them know why your story is worthy and make it as easy as you can for them to cover your issue and events.

Reporters may not attend your press conference as a matter of policy. This is where personal relationships help in convincing them to make an exception. However, if a reporter tells you in advance that he or she will not be able to make it to your press conference, send them a press release anyway and encourage them to use the information to build a story with their own sources. Determine the point of contact reporters may attempt to call for additional information and discuss with these individuals the importance of providing a clear message that emphasizes the health risks and the opportunities for managing the risks. The best way to establish good relationships with the media is to offer them opportunities for interesting and newsworthy stories. Offer a hard-to-get interview, local human interest stories, eye-catching visuals or pictures, and good audio for those in radio news. Always present your information as something that readers, listeners, and viewers deserve to learn.

Telling Your Radon Story

How to Pitch a Story

Pitching a news story to a reporter, editor, or producer can seem intimidating, but it is not difficult if you prepare yourself adequately. The most effective way to contact the media with a story idea is through a “pitch letter,” which provides the reporter or media with all the information they need to pursue the story.

Use the following tips to write a good pitch letter:

1. E-mail is often the best way to get your letter in front of the right person. Plan to follow up your e-mail with a timely phone call.
2. Keep it short. Journalists don't have much time to spend each day reading pitches. Begin your pitch with your most compelling information to grab the reader's interest, and explain the story in just a few paragraphs. If you have a news peg (see below), make it clear at the beginning of the letter.
3. Provide all the information journalists need to cover the story. Make sure your pitch covers the “Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How” of the story. Include your contact information, list possible sources, and include any relevant background material. If you have written a press release, paste that into the e-mail.
4. If you are pitching a broadcast outlet, remember that they are interested in gathering video footage. Tell them about possible photo-ops or events.

News Pegs

Journalists often look for “news pegs,” which make a discussion of a broad issue relevant to the moment and “newsworthy.” When trying to obtain coverage of radon issues, look for news pegs and point them out to the media when you speak to them. News pegs can be breaking news, or a simple event that brings a story into focus or makes it more timely. Below are some possible radon-related news pegs that can help frame other media pitches and guide your discussions with reporters.

- ▶ January is National Radon Action Month! This “month” is a great reason to promote radon awareness, and reporters will use that information to guide their coverage. Why is January a good time to take action against radon? Because it's an ideal month to test for radon in your home.
- ▶ Death of someone from lung cancer that was thought to be radon-related.
- ▶ Any speech, rally, event, or meeting can be an opportunity to involve the press.
- ▶ Any national coverage of radon, cancer-causing agents, or other health/air-quality disaster can be an opportunity

to remind readers that people can be exposed to a high level of radon every day, without knowing it. Local outlets look for ways to make national stories more relevant to local readers.

- ▶ Adoption of a radon resistant new construction code.

Radon Story Pitches

Here are some ideas for pitching the radon story to your local health, parenting, real estate, government, and other media outlets.

Nonsmokers Are at Risk for Lung Cancer – Although many people may be concerned about cancer prevention, nonsmokers may think they are not at risk for lung cancer. Is there someone in your area that has been diagnosed with lung cancer but never smoked? Work with local cancer advocacy groups to identify potential interviewees who would be willing to tell their stories. Tell the media about your spokesperson's life, battles, and provide tips on testing for and reducing radon levels in homes and other buildings.

Pitch to: Health outlets

Preventing Radon Exposure Can Help Prolong Your Life – Longevity is a popular consumer theme that can be leveraged to tell the radon story. Like diet, sleep, and exercise, having a healthy home and preventing radon exposure can have a positive effect on long-term health. This story would be particularly appealing to publications promoting natural health/lifestyles. ***Pitch to: Health outlets***

Prevent Radon for Healthier Homes – Because most people spend so much time inside, homes typically account for a major share of exposures to toxics that are harmful for families. Unlike other environmental hazards like lead paint, mold, moisture, and pests, you can't see or smell radon. Radon is a preventable health threat in the home. ***Pitch to: Health, parenting, home/real estate outlets***

Getting Your Home Ready for Winter – When a home is closed up during cooler weather months, radon can soar to a harmful level. Winter is usually an ideal time to test a home for radon. Editors may be interested in including this information in tips, columns, or articles about getting one's home ready for the winter. ***Pitch to: Home/real estate outlets***

Child-Proofing Your Home – Radon is often an overlooked health threat for parents who are concerned about creating a safe environment for their infants and children. Babies and children spend most of their time indoors and they are especially vulnerable to environmental health threats. Editors may wish to include information about the dangers of radon into stories about baby/child-proofing or tips for home health and safety. ***Pitch to: Parenting outlets***

Radon Testing in Action – If a well-known local business, organization, or government official is going to conduct a radon test, make it a media event. Invite the local press to observe the test beginning, and have officials and sources available for comment on the importance and ease of radon testing. When the test results are ready, invite the media back for an announcement of the results.

Pitch to: *Local government, health outlets*

Personal Story – Did you test your home for radon as part of National Radon Action Month? Whether the test revealed an elevated level or not, offer to tell your story to the media. Remind them that you tested as part of National Radon Action Month, and describe why you tested. Did you do it for your children? Do you know someone who had lung cancer? How are you taking action to fix your home if radon is present? A compelling, emotional angle to radon coverage helps put a human face on the issue. **Pitch to:** *Health, home/real estate, parenting outlets*

Media Outlets

Consider the following outlets for pitching your local radon story.

Health

- ▶ Local newspaper health reporter/health department
- ▶ Health producer at local news station
- ▶ Health reporter/producer at radio station
- ▶ Hospital medical newsletters
- ▶ Natural health publications
- ▶ Local retiree/senior publications
- ▶ To find other local health publications, reach out to your local hospital, clinic, gyms, and nursing/senior homes to see what publications they subscribe to or stock in their lobbies.

Children/Parenting

- ▶ Local newspaper education/youth reporter
- ▶ Newspaper columnists who write on parenting/children's issues
- ▶ Local newspaper's "Kids" section
- ▶ News desk at a local TV or radio station
- ▶ Local parenting magazines
- ▶ School newsletters
- ▶ To find publications in your area that focus on children's issues or parenting, reach out to your school board. Ask if they circulate newsletters to which you could contribute an article.

Home/Real Estate

- ▶ Real estate reporter/section of local newspaper
- ▶ Real estate listings magazines
- ▶ Local construction, real estate, or broker trade publications
- ▶ Local decorating/architecture/home and garden magazines

- ▶ If you're having trouble locating local real estate publications, reach out to a real estate professional and ask what publications they read or advertise in.

Local Government

- ▶ Metro section or local government reporters and columnists at newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations
- ▶ Local government Web site (city, county, state)
- ▶ Online bulletin boards for your neighborhood or town

Other Local Outlets

- ▶ Local consumer magazines like *The Virginian*, *The Washingtonian*, *Cleveland Magazine*.
- ▶ Local blogs are a top source for area outreach. Try to find a blog dedicated to covering local news, parenting, or local politics for radon outreach.
- ▶ Does your area include Hispanic or Asian media? Don't forget to reach out to Spanish-language or other media targeted toward an ethnic or non-English-speaking demographic.
- ▶ If there is a university or college in your area, contact their student newspaper(s).
- ▶ Cable channels and public broadcasting often offer a variety of local home, parenting, or news programs that might be amenable to a discussion on radon.
- ▶ Check talk radio listings for similar local programming options.
- ▶ If you don't get much response from local newspapers or broadcast outlets, try contacting their Web page staff. Often, outlets employ reporters for Web-only content.

Reaching Out to Non-Traditional Radon Stakeholders

Amy Inabinet of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) wanted to try something different in 2008 to promote National Radon Action Month. Knowing that many homes throughout Tennessee still needed to be tested for radon, and that most people receive an electric bill every month, Amy reached out to 20 electric utility cooperatives in smaller counties, hoping they might incorporate radon messages into their customer communications. She sent them a variety of basic radon information and images allowing the cooperatives to choose formats best suited for delivery along with their particular customer bills or newsletters.

Tennessee Magazine, with a subscriber base of 770,000, highlighted Amy's efforts with the cooperatives in their January 2008 issue, which led to an overwhelming response of nearly 4,000 requests for free radon test kits—nearly six times the number of requests received for the entire year of 2007! Requests were received from 90 of 95 Tennessee counties, demonstrating the reach of the article and Amy's other outreach efforts.

To continue building awareness about radon and radon testing throughout the year, Amy helped coordinate a highly publicized Governor's Proclamation for National Radon Action month. She and her colleagues also created a tri-fold brochure offering information on the dangers of radon and free test kits to be distributed at conferences around the state, as well as to non-traditional radon stakeholders, including rural health associations and the Tennessee Bee Keepers.

TDEC is also working to expand a program they implemented with the Department of Health during the 2008 National Radon Action Month. The Department of Health periodically offers "exchange stations" where mercury thermometers can be exchanged for digital thermometers. During National Radon Action Month, TDEC partnered with the Department of Health to offer radon test kits at these exchange stations. TDEC and the Department of Health are now working to establish a pilot project to have kits offered at the exchange on a regular basis.

