

## **WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO MAKE THE MOST OF NATIONAL RADON ACTION MONTH**

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### **Abstract**

Grabbing the attention of the public is not an easy thing to do, especially when conveying the risk of a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that consumers can only detect by testing. Sharing information about lung cancer, the devastating health effect from radon can be daunting. By pairing with partners, National Radon Action Month can be a marketing opportunity that should not be missed.

In January of 2008, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency teamed with the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, the American Lung Association of Illinois, Cook County Environmental, Chicago Department of Public Health and the United States Environmental Protection Agency Region V office as well as the University of Illinois Extension office and Illinois State University's Radon Awareness program to create events to reach the public. The combined efforts made each partner reach its maximum results with minimal input. Working together can work for any group to create an event that will spur radon outreach.

### **Introduction**

USEPA has designated the month of January as National Radon Action Month. Fondly known as NRAM, the USEPA website states "The aim of National Radon Action Month is to increase the public's awareness of radon, promote radon testing and mitigation, and advance the use of radon-resistant new construction practices."

While those of us who work in the radon industry promote radon year round, for thirty days, you have the opportunity to reach out and grab the attention of the media and the citizens of your state, county, or municipality. Competing with New Years and other first of the year activities can be daunting, so what can be done to obtain the maximum effort with minimal cost and input? Partnering is the answer.

By working with others you may convey the message that radon is a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. Sharing the message that radon can only be detected by testing, radon can easily be reduced through mitigation and when building a new home radon resistant you can reduce the radon potential and ease the cost of mitigation along with making it more aesthetically acceptable. When these messages play during NRAM you can take advantage of a once-a-year mega-marketing opportunity.

Combine forces with those with similar interests, your radon partners. Although this comes from a governmental perspective, the radon industry can use American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists (AARST) and other professional organizations like American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) etc. to achieve the same type of results. By using a professional organization or working with your state, county, nonprofit or extension counterpart, the message gains credibility and appears as more than a business promo.

## **Methodology**

In 2008, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) Radon Program joined forces to display and present in Chicago. We teamed with the American Lung Association of Illinois, Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, Cook County Environmental, Department of Chicago Public Health and University of Illinois Chicago, as well as Illinois State University and the University of Illinois Extension office for different activities. We kicked off our radon poster contest during radon action week with the University of Illinois Extension office at the helm.

Why work together? Why not just go it alone? Eileen Lowery of the Respiratory Health Association stated, ***“I was inspired to work with radon colleagues from throughout the state as we had the opportunity to bring the radon message to so many people in a variety of activities. It would have been impossible to get the message out to so many people without our partnership.”***

Some of the activities that Ms. Lowery refers to include radon displays in Chicago at the Cook County Building which was secured by Martha Jones of Cook County Environmental, the American Lung Association Building which Angela Tin and other ALA staff secured and the USEPA Region V office where radon presentations were also made to USEPA staff. Mike Murphy and Jeanette Marrero set up this event. What did it accomplish? Over a three-day period, over 600 radon test kits (or coupons) and radon information were distributed. Statewide about 33% of residents use the radon test kits (ALA has had a usage rate of 34%). Recently IEMA sent out a follow-up survey. Many that did not initially test are now testing, so this percentage should increase in the future.



*Eileen Lowery, Cindy Ladage, Tony Amatto, Sherrill Keefe and Martha Jones at the Cook County Building*

Setting up in public areas and in places of employment worked well allowing us to share the radon message in a nonthreatening way. By including local experts and nonprofits the radon message gained credibility that state program, federal agencies or a business may not garner alone. Wikipedia defines a nonprofit organization as one that “is a legally constituted organization whose objective is to support or engage in activities of public or private interest without any commercial or monetary profit.”

Together we had fact sheets, displays, and material and a variety of expertise that included a nurse and an environmental educator who could answer questions on lung cancer, and locals who knew radon levels in the vicinity.

Angela Tin, Director of Environmental Services for the ALA shared, ***“The American Lung Association of Illinois is a proud partner with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) in educating the public on the principles of radon testing and mitigation to reduce exposure to this known health hazard.”***

Reducing exposure, lowering the risk of lung cancer, is everyone’s goal and the exhibits provided risk-reduction information to a cross section of the Chicago urban population. Along with the exhibits, which can work for anyone anywhere, press coverage can provide extended coverage long after the event is over. This is the case for the Radon Networking Day that also takes place during National Radon Action Month. Ruth Ann Lipic of Illinois State University’s Radon Awareness Program coordinates with IEMA to create a learning opportunity for radon partners. This event promotes sharing ideas and emphasizes how to maximize results with minimal input by working together. Ruth Ann Lipic shared, ***“By planning together for a Radon Networking Day, we have been able to***

***invite and educate new radon partners and grantees from across the state. It is a formula of 1+1=3.”***

How does this same type of event work for those in the radon industry? You can work with home inspectors, real estate agents, bankers, mortgage lenders and builders and share what is new in the industry. Together you can share resources to spread the word about radon locally. A press release can make a meeting a media event. At Radon Networking Day Gloria Linnertz received the second annual Radon in Excellence Award. Ruth Ann Lipic was the first deserving recipient. Combining the award with the networking day created an event that some media willingly covered. A picture taken at an event can also serve as part of a follow-up article in your newsletter, professional publication, or local newspaper.



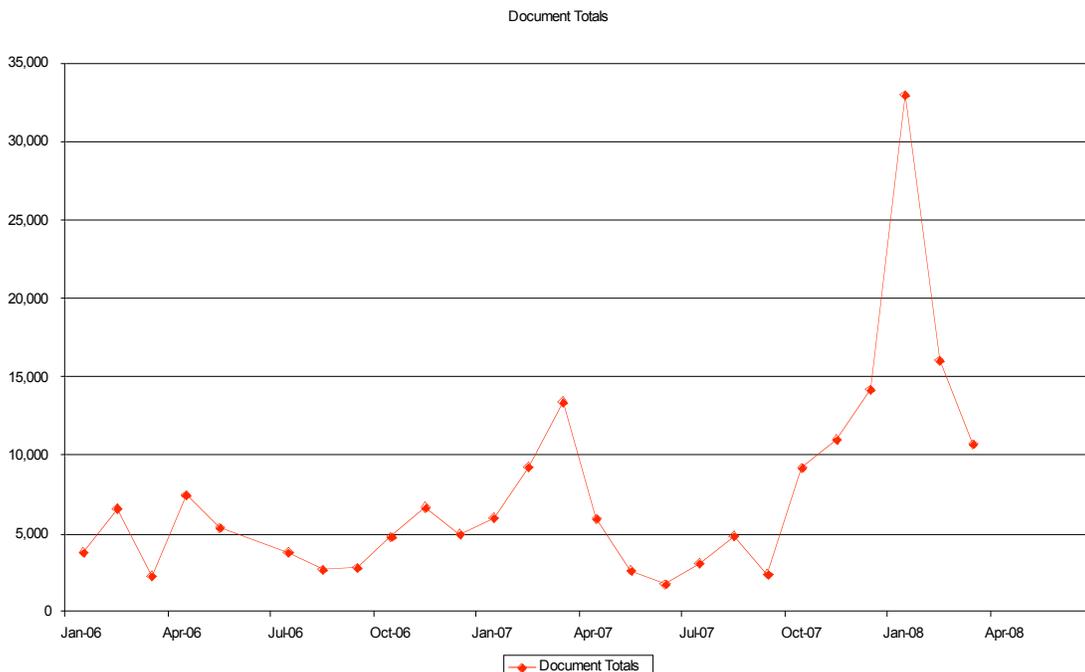
*Joe Klinger the Illinois Emergency Management Agency Assistant Director hands out the award to the 2008 winner Gloria Linnertz.*

Spreading the word about radon through publications during NRAM is another successful way to spread information about radon. This year, Barb Sorgatz, a lung-cancer survivor was willing to share her story with several media outlets, and the press listened. Articles from Barb's story appeared in Chicago papers as well as the Illinois Public Health Association Newsletter. IEMA also had several publications that picked up articles about radon and the importance of testing. All these combined with the fact that the new Radon Awareness Act went into affect during NRAM brought a lot of attention to the radon subject. The attendance of Barb Sorgatz and Gloria Linnertz at Radon Networking Days increased attention to this subject. Seventy-five attendees, a record, attended this one-day event.



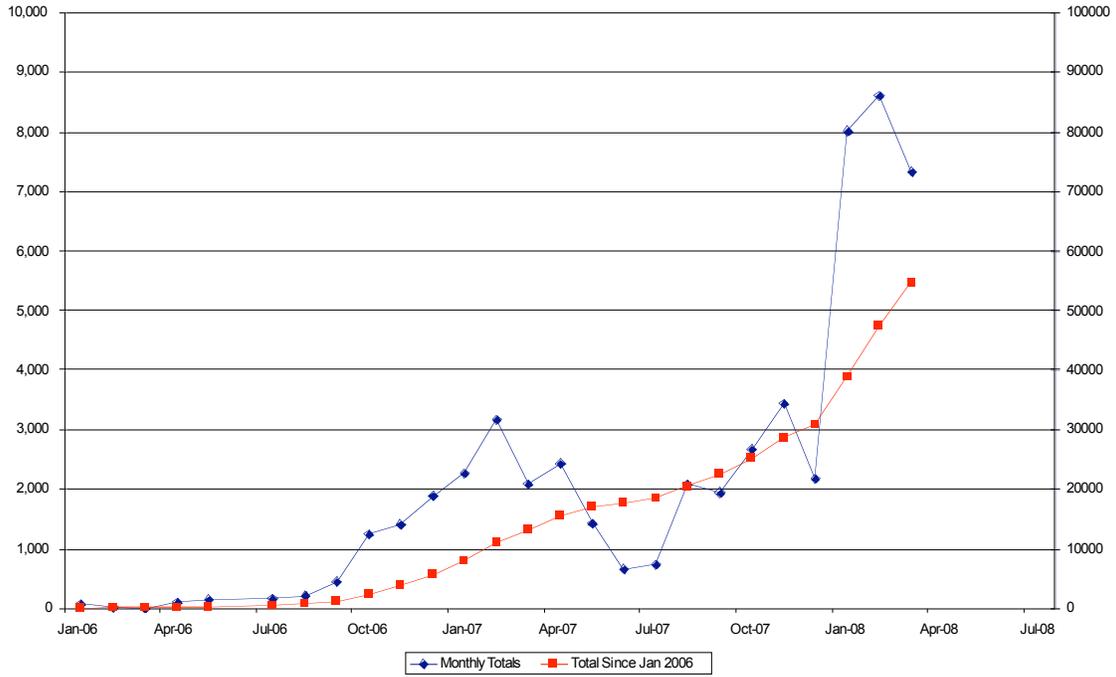
### Conclusion- Documenting Results

By tracking calls, website hits, and other numbers you can measure the impact of an outreach effort. Again, when partnering their efforts count also as your own. Here are the radon document requests over a two-year period (see the January 2008 spike). Keep in mind that the new Act does account for a lot of the numbers being reported.



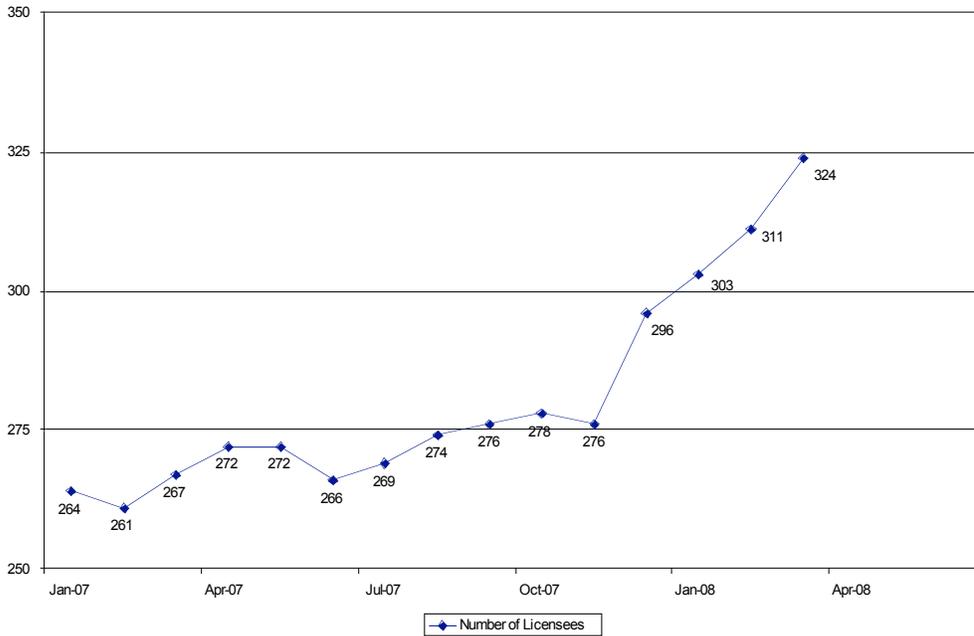
As you can see below, the test-kit requests parallel this chart.

### Test-Kit Totals



### Licensed Professionals

Number of Licensees



Media coverage can create sparks of interest that go on long after the event. In many cases where spikes are shown for requests for extra documents and test kits, this was not always from the result of a national newspaper. Many times the spike was from some of the local weekly papers that picked up a story. Those living in the vicinity reacted from the story up to a month or two after the story hit the paper. This can be especially seen in the spike from January to February 2008.

You can't be everywhere during NRAM, but you can promote your radon activities through a variety of ways such as your website, radio shows, press releases and other means that don't always require you to be there.

### **Additional Resources**

What other resources can help maximize your marketing efforts during NRAM? There are several sources that can provide you with the assistance you need to share your message. Most state-agency radon programs offer free radon publications. USEPA has a variety of publications as well. See the USEPA website at <http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs>.

The University of Illinois Extension Office also created a website with IEMA that answers general questions about radon that you might find useful. See [www.takeactiononradon.uiuc.edu](http://www.takeactiononradon.uiuc.edu).

The American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists, AARST, also has resources available on its website as well. See [http://www.aarst.org/radon\\_info.shtml](http://www.aarst.org/radon_info.shtml).

Both the American Lung Association <http://www.lungil.org/> and the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago <http://www.lungchicago.org> can also provide information about radon and lung cancer. The American Lung Association's toll free line, 1-800-LUNG-USA, offers one-on-one telephone assistance with nurses and medical personnel who can answer questions pertaining to lung cancer.

## References

<http://iaq.custhelp.com/> “Frequently Asked Questions”

Eileen Lowery of the Respiratory Health Association

Ruth Ann Lipic, Illinois State University Radon Awareness Program

Angela Tin, American Lung Association of Illinois

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-profit\\_group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-profit_group) “Not for Profit Organizations”

IEMA’s “Radon Outreach” power point presentation presented at 2008 Region V meeting in Cleveland, Ohio.

<http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs> “How to Order”

[http://www.aarst.org/radon\\_info.shtml](http://www.aarst.org/radon_info.shtml) “What is Radon”

[www.takeactiononradon.uiuc.edu](http://www.takeactiononradon.uiuc.edu)

<http://www.lungil.org/search> “radon query”

[http://www.aarst.org/radon\\_info.shtml](http://www.aarst.org/radon_info.shtml).

<http://www.lungil.org/>

<http://www.lungchicago.org>