Why Multifamily Radon Testing Matters More Than You Think

If you manage or own a multifamily building in St. Louis, you have probably heard about radon gas. But the reality of radon testing in a building with dozens of units is different from a single-family home. The stakes are higher, the logistics are more complex, and the regulations can be surprising. I have seen property owners assume a single short-term test in a basement is enough, only to discover later that a unit on the third floor had elevated radon levels for years. That is why multifamily radon testing deserves its own conversation.

The Unique Challenge of Radon in Multifamily Buildings

Radon gas moves through soil and enters buildings through cracks in foundations, gaps around pipes, and other openings. In a single-family home, the primary entry points are usually in the basement or crawl space. In a multifamily building, the situation is more layered. You might have ground-floor units with slab-on-grade construction, upper floors with different ventilation patterns, and a shared HVAC system that can distribute radon from one part of the building to another. I once worked on a property where a first-floor apartment had perfectly safe radon levels, but the unit directly above it showed readings above the EPA action level because of a pressure differential and a poorly sealed elevator shaft.

That is why multifamily radon testing cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. You need a plan that accounts for the building's design, the number of units, and the specific use of each space. A common mistake is testing only common areas or a handful of vacant units. But occupied units, especially those on lower floors or with poor air circulation, can tell a very different story.

What Good Multifamily Radon Testing Looks Like

Professional radon testers follow protocols set by the EPA and, where applicable, the National Radon Program. For multifamily buildings, this usually means placing radon detectors in a representative sample of units across all floor levels, including ground-floor units, units above crawl spaces, and units near potential entry points like sump pumps or utility penetrations. The testing period matters too. Short-term radon tests, which last two to seven days, can give you a quick snapshot, but they are sensitive to weather conditions and occupant behavior. Long-term radon tests, lasting 90 days to a year, provide a more reliable average of radon levels throughout the seasons.

In St. Louis, where soil composition and building stock vary widely, I have found that continuous radon monitors are especially useful for multifamily properties. These electronic

devices record radon levels hour by hour, so you can see if spikes happen at certain times of day or when windows are closed. That kind of detail helps when you are deciding whether to install mitigation systems or simply adjust ventilation schedules.

HUD and Lender Testing Requirements

If your property is involved in a real estate transaction or financed through a program backed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, you may be required to perform HUD-compliant radon testing. HUD's requirements are specific: they mandate testing in all ground-floor units and common areas, and they expect testers to follow strict quality control procedures. The same goes for lender testing. Many mortgage lenders, especially those dealing with FHA or VA loans, now require radon testing as a condition of financing. I have seen deals held up because a property owner assumed a single test from five years ago would satisfy the lender, only to learn that the lender requires a current test performed by a licensed radon tester following the lender's own guidelines.

Multifamily radon testing for HUD and lender purposes is not just about checking a box. It protects everyone involved. The buyer knows the indoor air quality is safe, the lender knows the collateral is not compromised by a hidden health hazard, and the seller can move forward with confidence. In my experience, properties that have a recent, thorough radon test on file close faster and with fewer surprises.

Choosing the Right Tester and Approach

Not all radon testing services are the same. For a multifamily building, you want someone who understands building science, not just someone who can drop a charcoal canister in a basement. A good tester will walk the property with you, look at the foundation type, the HVAC system, and any existing radon-resistant construction features. They will ask about tenant turnover, recent renovations, and any past radon remediation efforts. They should also be licensed and familiar with the specific regulations in your area.

Air Sense Environmental, for example, focuses on commercial and multifamily radon testing and mitigation in St. Louis. They know the local geology and the common construction styles here. When they do multifamily radon testing, they use continuous radon monitors and place them according to a sampling plan that meets both EPA and HUD standards. They also provide clear reports that you can share with lenders, tenants, or buyers.

What Happens After Testing

If radon levels come back high, the next step is mitigation. The most common system for multifamily buildings is sub-slab depressurization, which pulls radon from beneath the concrete slab and vents it safely above the roof. In some cases, sealing cracks and improving

ventilation may be enough, but a proper mitigation system is usually the most reliable fix. The cost of mitigation is far less than the potential health risks or the impact on property value. I have seen buildings where elevated radon levels were scaring off tenants, and after installing a mitigation system, the units rented quickly again.

One thing that surprises many property owners is that radon levels can change over time. Soil settles, foundations shift, and new construction nearby can alter the pathways radon uses to enter a building. That is why periodic retesting is a good idea, especially after major renovations or changes to the HVAC system.

The Bigger Picture: Indoor Air Quality and Resident Health

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking, according to the EPA. That statistic alone should make multifamily radon testing a priority for any property owner. But beyond the health risk, testing is about trust. Tenants want to know that the building they live in is safe. Buyers want to know that the property they are investing in is sound. In a competitive rental market like St. Louis, a building with documented, safe radon levels stands out.

I have also noticed that multifamily radon testing often leads to broader conversations about indoor air quality. Once you start measuring radon, you might also discover issues with moisture, mold, or poor ventilation that were flying under the radar. Addressing those problems can improve tenant satisfaction and reduce long-term maintenance costs.

Practical Tips for Property Owners

- Test at least every three to five years, or more often if you make structural changes.
- Use a mix of short-term and long-term tests to get both a quick reading and a reliable average.
- Hire a licensed radon tester who has experience with multifamily properties.

If you are in the middle of a real estate transaction, start the testing early. Waiting until the last minute can cause delays, especially if you need to mitigate before closing. And remember, the cheapest test is not always the best. A poorly placed detector or a rushed protocol can give you false peace of mind.

Final Thoughts

Multifamily radon testing is not just a regulatory hurdle. It is a practical, responsible step for anyone who owns or manages a building with multiple units. The process takes some planning, but the payoff is real: healthier residents, smoother transactions, and a property that

holds its value over time. In St. Louis, where radon is a known concern, staying ahead of the issue is simply smart business.