

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. Email is often the best way to get your letter in front of the right person. Plan to follow up your email 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 email.
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.

- ▶ 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, non-smokers 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 – Have you tested your home for radon? Whether the test revealed an elevated level or not, offer to tell your story to the media. Remind them that you tested 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 website (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.