

# EAQAC Minutes

February 6, 2013

Present: Paul Bubbosh, Melitta Carter, Bernie Bloom, Ed Barbour, Sam Biondo, Ken Cantor, Reuven Walder, Fred Booth, Eric Coffman. Guests: Jacques Sirvain and Jay Lubin

Absent: Tim Whitehouse, Jim McDonnell, Steve Gibb, Stephen Shaw, Aaron Cutler

The meeting was called to order at 6:55 pm. January minutes were approved.

## Discussion Items:

### **1. Refuse Hauling (Paul Bubbosh):**

The County refuse hauling program does not cover all areas. Paul received a flyer from Ecology Services offering trash service at \$7 per month, half the price he was currently paying. All of their vehicles are CNG, and clean and quiet. He advised the company to advertise that fact in future flyers.

### **2. Radon (Bernie Bloom):**

Bernie introduced Jay Lubin, a bio-statistician who developed a model to calculate cancer causes due to radon, and Jacques Sirvain, member of the committee which developed the new radon standard. Bernie provided a written update on radon standards and codes (to be added as an appendix of the minutes).

#### Questions Raised:

- Should the 2015 codes be voluntary or mandatory; and
  - Should EAQAC advise the County Executive and the County Council to adopt the new standards, or tighten the new standards further.
1. Jay Lubin stated that nationally 4-6% of homes have radon levels greater than 4 pCi/L, but up to 35% of homes tested in Montgomery County are above this level.
  2. Bernie said that radon reduction infrastructure used in 50% of new homes was ineffective.
  3. 40-100 cases annually of lung cancer in MoCo are attributable to radon.
  4. In 1995 MD dropped its radon program because it was estimated to cost \$10,000 per life saved which was considered too high.
  5. With radon levels between 2pCi/L and 4pCi/L, it is estimated that 6,000 people will die each year.

6. Jay said that a maximum of 4pCi/L could be revisited, and the maximum re-set at 2pCi/L, but that this is a political decision.

Everybody on the Committee present at the meeting had had their homes tested for radon. Four who had levels over 4pCi/L had active radon reduction systems installed.

**Current issues with new homes:** The pipes supposedly installed for passive radon reduction get filled in with gravel, sometimes the pipes carrying the flow away from the house are lower than the height of the building, and sometimes pipes are in the wrong place.

With new construction, cost of a passive system is about \$400, an active system about \$800. Added to that there is an annual cost of running the active system (the electricity to run the fan).

**Existing homes:** No legislation exists concerning radon concentrations.

Bernie suggested that before a house sale, it should be tested to assure that the level of radon is below 4pCi/L. However, the cost of remediation is between \$800 and \$2,000.

A further issue is that levels vary between winter and summer. Different tests have different costs and timings. It is not easy to get a representative reading. Only a test with a 1 year duration would be really accurate.

Sam made suggestions concerning education initiatives for radon issues:

He suggested that EAQAC could review the current information about radon contained in the training materials for realtors, brokers, and other licensees used for preparation for the Maryland licensing exams and for CEU courses for current licensees. For example, "Modern Real Estate Practice" by F.W. Galaty, Wellington J. Allaway, and Robert C. Kyle, and "Maryland Real Estate Practice & Law," by Donald A. White, are example of recent text books. Texts used in local colleges and university real estate courses and Approved Education Providers - Maryland Real Estate Commission

(<http://www.dllr.state.md.us/license/mrec/mrecproviders.shtml>) could be reviewed as well as other materials used by education providers. He mentioned that CEU courses are very popular (and a main attraction) at the Maryland Association of Realtors annual conference and expo (<http://www.mdrealtor.org/conference.aspx>) which is held annually in Ocean City.

Eric mentioned that he has contacts at GCAR (<http://gcaar.com/>) who also offer training locally, sometimes with free CEU courses for members.

Bernie mentioned that he lectures for Long & Foster. L&F has a "university" in-house, e.g., in the Kentlands, at various sites.

Sam observed that to make an indelible impact on people who take the licensing exam, one could get the testing staff to include key questions about radon on the exams. It is customary for trainees to be briefed on what is likely to be covered on the exams and given the "heads up" they are likely to include that in their "must knows."

The "curriculum" for licensees includes more than one CEU course where information concerning radon is pertinent and important.

**Committee Recommendations:**

A. Send a letter to the County Council recommending that the new regulations (see attachment) are adopted. The DPS has three choices; to decline to adopt the standard, to adopt it in 2015, or to adopt it now. EAQAC will recommend adopting it now, continuing with the tradition of leadership in the State.

B. In addition, EAQAC will suggest that the County develop an education component, with the following possibilities:

1. Give testing kits for free;
2. Test in winter for the highest readings;
3. Issue a Public Service Announcement; or
4. Use others to disseminate information such as real estate agents.
5. Educate realtors, with a "healthy home" curriculum;
6. Have High Schools or Middle Schools take the lead, maybe by giving EPA testing kits to schools.

Bernie will write this letter to be submitted to the Committee by the next meeting in March.

**DEP Update:**

Home Energy Score program: DOE and their contractor SRA for the Home Energy Score (HES), met with DEP and three EAQAC members. The HES is calculated using a software model. This was an initial discussion looking at the appropriateness of the model for the County.

Fred considered the model to be over simple, and that it excludes many house models. That the linear scale (1-10) is easy to understand, but it is too much of an over-simplification.

Bernie had his own home assessed by LEAP. He believes that the HES can be used as a

conversation opener, a way to look at the energy bill with the home-owner. He also considered that the County may not be the best partner since there could be conflict of interest with the auditors.

Reuven considered that if the goal of the program is to motivate people to take action, and to set targets for their homes and make improvements so that their homes are more attractive to potential buyers, the HES could be relevant, but he was not sure that the program is currently good enough to compare homes.

Ed thought that the premise was good, but that there are too many issues involved to make it a legal requirement for selling a house. It would best be used by individuals as a marketing tool.

Bernie said that from the DOE point of view it needs to be simple in order to be used throughout the US, and therefore accuracy will necessarily be compromised.

Eric said there are three decision points:

1. Is it useful?
2. What is it useful for?
3. Does it just add cost to the audit process (probably \$30-\$40) or does it lead people to want an audit?

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm. Next meeting is March 6<sup>th</sup>.