

SANITARY SEWER SMOKE TESTING FAQ



Q: What is a smoke test?

A: It is the process of injecting artificially produced smoke into a blocked off pipeline segment to see where the smoke emerges. If the sewer is in good condition, the forced smoke will emerge from manhole lids along the line and house vents on the roof. If the line has defects, the smoke will find the break and try to escape that way.

It is not unusual to see plumes of smoke billowing up from peculiar places, such as cracks in the street or in residential yards during testing.

While testing, you will see a crew of workers spread out to observe and flag the places smoke escapes. Technicians document and/or mark the location where a defect is found so it can be repaired.

Q: Will there be smoke in my house?

A: Probably not, but it is possible that smoke could enter a residence through a drain trap which has dried out or some other plumbing defect such as an un-tapped washing machine drain, cracked pipe, garbage disposal or dishwasher not installed correctly. Residents are encouraged to add water to any infrequently used drains before testing.

If smoke does come into your house, open some windows to allow it to escape. If you have any doubt as to the origin of the smoke, call 9-1-1.

Q: What is the purpose of smoke testing?

A: A wastewater system or sanitary sewer system is designed to transport wastewater to a treatment facility. In dry weather it usually does so without issue.

However, in wet weather, storm-related runoff may leak into the sewer system, resulting in an increased volume of flow that the system was not designed to handle. This situation is called inflow and is the process of storm water runoff getting into the sanitary sewer system.

Inflow can result in overburdening the sanitary sewer system, which may result in sanitary sewer overflows.

Smoke testing is one of the best and most cost effective ways to locate defects in the main sewer line and service laterals that connect to a residence.

Q: Is the smoke hazardous?

A: The smoke is not harmful to you, your pets or house plants. It will not harm or stain clothes, drapes or furniture. It is not flammable and does not create a fire hazard. It is recommended to avoid prolonged periods of exposure. If smoke appears from a drain inside your residence, open windows and ventilate well to dissipate the smoke.

Q: When will testing begin?

A: August 30 - November 15
A map of implicated areas is on our website. Residents will be notified within 72 hours of when crews will be in their area with a doorhanger.

