

Sanitary Sewer Smoke Testing

Frequently Asked Questions

What is smoke testing?

Smoke testing consists of blowing artificial smoke “vapor” into the sanitary sewer system and observing where the smoke exits the system, in order to locate deficiencies and areas of the sewer system that need updating. Smoke is expected to exit from manholes and the sewer vent stack of houses in the area; however, smoke exiting from your yard suggest a possible break in the sewer line.

What is the purpose of smoke testing?

The purpose of smoke testing is to find potential points of inflow and infiltration (i.e. cracks in pipe, improper connections, etc.) of unwanted water into the sewer system.

What are the benefits of smoke testing?

Smoke testing is the most efficient and cost effective method of determining where unwanted water is entering the sewer system and areas of the sewer system that need improvement. The testing can also help identify issues with plumbing in buildings. The smoke is harmless, odorless and will disappear after only a few minutes.

Is the smoke harmful?

No. The smoke is not harmful. It will not harm humans, pets, plants or stain clothing, drapes or furniture. If the smoke enters your home, it may make you cough, as any vapor can be an irritant, especially to individuals with existing respiratory issues.

What should I do to prepare for the smoke testing?

You should ensure that all plumbing drain traps (i.e. under sinks, tubs, washing machine, floor drains) have water in them, as water will prevent smoke from entering your house through the pipes. Simply flush your toilet, run water in all sinks and tubs for a minute and pour water into your basement floor drain. Frequently used drain traps typically have water in them; however, infrequently used drain traps may go dry.

How long will the testing take?

City crews may be in your area for a few hours; however, each smoke test setup takes about 30 minutes to complete. Most homes will only be in the test area for one or two tests.

Do I have to be home during the smoke test?

No. Inspection crews will not need to enter your home to complete the smoke test; however, they will walk around the outside of your house and yard looking for smoke exiting the sewer system.

I will not be at home during the testing and have pets. Should I be concerned?

The smoke is not harmful to pets but you could place your pet in an area that has no plumbing or leave windows partially open for ventilation, should any smoke enter the building. If you have proper connections and all of the traps have water in them, there should not be any problems.

Will smoke testing allow smoke to get into my house?

No, provided that your plumbing is installed correctly and functioning properly and all drain traps are filled with water.

What does it mean if smoke enters my house?

If smoke enters your home during the test, it probably means there are deficiencies in the plumbing that may allow potentially dangerous sewer gases to enter.

Can smoke activate smoke alarms?

Yes, smoke alarms may be activated during the smoke test if the smoke enters your home. If possible, windows should be open for ventilation.

What should I do if smoke gets into the house?

Exit your home immediately and notify the smoke testing crew. The smoke is not harmful; however, there may be sewer gases in your house. Also, the smoke may be due to a real fire and not from the smoke test. **If you have any doubts as to the origin of the smoke, please call 911.**