

# Sewer Smoke Testing: Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: June 29, 2021



## Is the smoke from this type of test hazardous?

Not at all! This process is endorsed by the Environmental Protection Agency. The odorless, colorless simulated smoke will not cause a fire or explosion and is not hazardous or flammable. This “smoke” is similar to what you might see at a live concert or theater show. Simulated smoke should disappear quickly. However, it’s encouraged to avoid unnecessary exposure to the smoke if possible, as extended exposure may cause some skin irritation. All smoke, even from candles, can cause irritation of breathing passages. Since any smoke can be an irritant, direct contact with the smoke make cause minor respiratory irritation in some people. Individuals with respiratory problems such as chronic asthma, emphysema, or other respiratory conditions should avoid direct exposure to the smoke. Material safety data sheets (MSDS) are available upon request.

## How will I know when the testing is scheduled to occur?

Field crews will distribute door hangers between 1-4 days before testing will take place. Specific neighborhood schedules will be updated on the District’s website at [www.spwater.org/smoketesting](http://www.spwater.org/smoketesting). Signs will also be placed along the roadways during the testing.

## I will not be at home during smoke testing and have pets in the house. What should I do?

The smoke is not harmful to pets. It would be a good idea to leave windows partially open for ventilation, should any smoke enter the building.

## How long does the testing process take?

For a single city block, smoke testing lasts approximately 30 minutes. Residents may see the simulated smoke coming from manhole covers, storm drains, roof vents or building foundations. Smoke coming from roof vents on the roofs of homes is a normal occurrence and indicates to the crews that smoke has filled all sewer pipes.

## How can residents and businesses prepare for smoke testing?

We recommend that you flush all toilets and run water down all sinks, tubs, and laundry drains before the first day of the testing period to make sure that all drain traps contain enough water to prevent smoke from entering the building.



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## Will contractors enter my home?

The field crew that performs the smoke testing will not enter your home during the testing process. If there is a concern, please locate the field crew outside in the street). If smoke does enter the home, it indicates that there may be an issue and we advise that residents contact a licensed plumber to address and fix faulty issues.

## Will smoke enter my house? What should we do if it does?

The smoke from smoke testing should not enter homes or buildings. However, do not be alarmed if it does. The smoke is not toxic. Property owners are encouraged to open their doors and windows to ventilate the area. Simulated smoke should clear out quickly and will not stain walls or furniture or leave residue. The smoke is safe, but long exposure may cause irritation. If there is a concern, please locate the field crew outside in the street, or call the District office at 425.392.6256 for assistance.

If smoke does enter, this can be caused by:

- A leak in your plumbing
- A sewer vent that vents to your attic or inside your building
- A faulty seal like in your toilet's wax ring
- A missing sink or drain trap

## Will first responders be on standby in case of emergency?

The District will notify Eastside Fire and Rescue in advance of the testing. The fire departments will have the neighborhood testing schedules.

## Could the smoke from the testing set off (activate) my smoke detectors or fire sprinkler system?

The "smoke" is not a fire hazard. However, there is a slight possibility that it could activate smoke alarms, but only in extreme cases of existing issues in a building. To dissipate the smoke, open doors and windows. If you have any doubts about the origin of the smoke, please call 911. The smoke will not set off fire sprinkler systems. Fire sprinklers are designed to respond to heat. They do not detect smoke or trigger when smoke is present in the room.

## Can smoke plug the sewer system?

There is no way smoke can plug the sewer. The smoke is made up of a vaporized substance.