



**City of Gold Beach
PUBLIC WORKS**

City Hall: 541-247-7029

Public Works Shop: 541-247-7459

WHAT IS SEWER SMOKE TESTING AND WHY DOES THE CITY DO IT?

Smoke testing is performed periodically as part of the city's ongoing sewer inspection and repair program. The primary purpose of the smoke testing is to identify leaks in the sewer system. These infiltration points allow storm water or other unauthorized water to enter the sewer system. Unauthorized water causes an unnecessary load on the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and can potentially cause sanitary sewer backups. The leaks also identify areas that can be infiltrated by rodents or other critters.

Secondarily, the smoke also identifies end user problems. If the smoke enters residential or commercial customer buildings during testing this signals a deficiency in their building sewer. Exposure to sewer gas can be a serious health and safety issue. This is addressed further in this information bulletin.

How does the testing work?

During the testing, a special, **non-toxic smoke** is forced into the sewer lines in your neighborhood. *This smoke leaves no residuals or stains and has no effect on plants or animals. Direct contact with the smoke may cause minor respiratory irritation in some people.* The smoke under pressure will fill the main line plus any connections and then follow the path of any leak to the ground surface, quickly revealing the source of the problem. Only enough force to overcome atmospheric pressure is required. As long as openings exist for the smoke to follow, smoke tests are effective, regardless of surface type, soil type and depth of lines.

Why Should the City Smoke Test?

Smoke testing is the most efficient and cost effective way to locate and identify where unauthorized water is entering the sewer system, and where sewer mainlines have maintenance issues.

Smoke testing is becoming a requirement nationwide for locating unauthorized water problems that are threatening the ability to properly treat wastewater and putting excessive loads onto treatment facilities. Unnecessarily treating storm water

results in higher operating costs and affects the overall rate charged for sewer services.

Smoke testing also helps identify plumbing leaks in buildings. Sewer gases can cause health problems for building occupants. Please read our *WHAT IS SEWER GAS AND SHOULD I BE CONCERNED* informational bulletin for specific info.

Smoke in your Home or Building

To keep smoke from unnecessarily entering your structure, run water into all of your drains for one minute, especially those used infrequently.

Smoke should not enter your structure unless:

- Vents connected to your building's sewer pipe are inadequate, defective or improperly installed;
- Traps (commonly called P-traps) under sinks, tubs, basins, showers and other drains are dry, defective, improperly installed or missing; or
- Pipe, connections and seals of the wastewater drain system in and under your building are damaged, defective, have clean out plugs missing or are improperly installed.

If you do see or smell smoke in your structure, immediately report it to the City.

This may mean that harmful gases from the sewer are entering your structure.

Call (541-247-7029) or stop by City Hall. You can also notify the Public Works crew if you see them in the neighborhood during testing.

It is essential to locate the source of the smoke entering your home and correct it as soon as possible to prevent any health and safety issues related to sewer gas.

Do not be concerned if you see testing smoke coming from your rooftop (or your neighbors) sewer vents; this is normal.

Smoke Testing FAQ

Q. Will smoke testing of the sewers allow smoke to get into my home?

A. No, provided that your plumbing drain "traps" are not dry or you have no leaks in your building sewer lines. Drains that are used once every several weeks should be okay. If you are not sure, simply run water down the drain for a minute to ensure that the trap is not dry. It is important to locate dry traps as they could allow sewer gas to enter the home.

Q. Is the smoke harmful?

A. The product utilized by the City is called Superior Smoke Fluid—or Signal Smoke Liquid. The testing product has been determined *not to be hazardous* by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The most current Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) is attached to this informational bulletin. This testing process is endorsed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and has been safely used on municipal sewer systems since 1961.

Since any smoke can be an irritant, direct contact with the smoke may 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.

Q. What should I do if smoke gets into the house?

A. Open windows and doors for ventilation. The smoke will quickly dissipate. Contact a Public Works crew member working in the area, or call City Hall at 541-247-7029, and notify us of the smoke in your building.

Q. If smoke gets into the house, how long does it take the smoke to dissipate?

A. The smoke will dissipate quickly with adequate ventilation.

Q. What is the purpose of smoke testing?

A. The main purpose of smoke testing is to locate areas where unauthorized water may be entering the sewer system, and other compromised areas of the sewer system that could result in rodent intrusion or waste spills.

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

A. The City does not test very often—less than annually. When we do test, we publish smoke testing dates and general information in the Reporter and the Pilot. We ask KGBR to run PSAs notifying listeners. We post the testing information on the City website: www.goldbeachoregon.gov, and we post info updates to our facebook page: www.facebook.com/CityofGoldBeach

We do not go door-to-door or mail individual notices.

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

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

Q. Can smoke plug the sewer?

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

Q. Where does the smoke appear?

A. Smoke may be seen coming from roof vents, building foundations, manhole covers or yard cleanouts. Smoke coming from roof vents on the roof of homes is a normal occurrence and indicates to the crews that smoke has filled all sewers.

Q. What happens if the City finds a bad sewer connector or leak?

A. This information will be documented for further investigation.

Q. Will rodents be smoked out?

A. No. However, the smoke may detect broken building sewers where there is a potential for rodent access. Owners will be notified to repair broken building sewers.