Smoke Testing Questions and Answers

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Q: Why is the City smoke testing the sewer system?
A: The Department of Environmental Quality is requiring the City to test for sources of inflow and infiltration in the sewer system.

Q: What is the purpose of smoke testing?
A: It is a safe, efficient and cost-effective way to identify breaks and connection problems in the sewer system that is allowing storm water to enter. Identifying these problems will decrease the risk of sewer overflow and help minimize the increasing costs of wastewater treatment.

Q: Will anyone enter my home?
A: The work crew will not need to enter your home.

Q: Do I need to be home during the testing?
A: You do not need to be home during testing.

Q: Is the smoke harmful?
A: The smoke is not harmful. The smoke that is used in the testing is actually a highly visible mist.

Q: What is the smoke comprised of?
A: The smoke is comprised of Water Condensate, Hydrated Zinc Chloride, Carbon Monoxide, and other ingredients present in negligible amount and/or non-hazardous.

Q: Will smoke enter my house?
A: Smoke should not enter your house. However, smoke can enter when the traps under sinks, tubs, showers and other drains are dry, defective, improperly installed or missing. Also, smoke can enter if the pipe connections and seals of your wastewater system are defective or improperly installed.

Q: If smoke enters my house what should I do?
A: If you see or smell the smoke in your house, you should notify the work crew performing the test or call the City's Public Works Department. Smoke in the house may indicate that there is toxic and dangerous sewer gases entering your home and a plumbing professional should be contacted as soon as possible to resolve this problem. The City is not liable for any repair cost on private property.

Q: If smoke enters my house, how long will it take to dissipate?
A: The smoke will dissipate after a few minutes of being introduced into the system. Opening windows and doors will help the smoke dissipate more quickly from your home.

Q: What if I have health problems or a lung condition?
A: If you are concerned about the smoke affecting your condition please step outside your home if the smoke enters the house during test.

Q: Does the smoke leave residues or stains?
A: It will not leave any stains or residue.

Q: Can the smoke set off smoke alarms?
A: The smoke may set off your alarm and is not a fire hazard. The fire department and 911 will have been notified prior to testing.

Q: Is there something that I can do to prepare for the smoke testing?
A: To help stop the smoke from entering your home, run or pour water down all the drains in your home.

Q: What happens if the testing locates leaks or bad connections?
A: The work crew will document the information. This information will be used by the City to help identify problems in the sewer system which need repair.