

# Smoke Testing of Sanitary Sewers FAQ

## **What is Smoke Testing?**

Smoke testing is a safe, quick way to find areas of the sewer system that need updating. The smoke used in the test has no odor, not harmful to your health, and will disappear in a few minutes.

The test consists of blowing a harmless colored vapor into the sanitary sewer manholes and observing the points where the smoke exits. The smoke is expected to exit from manholes and the sewer stack at the top of your house.

The smoke should not enter your home if it is properly plumbed and if your sink and drain traps contain water.

## **How will residents know when Smoke Testing will be performed in their neighborhoods?**

Prior to beginning the smoke testing, Cumberland County will mail notices to all homes/buildings in the area to be smoke tested at least 2 weeks in advance. A smoke testing schedule will also be posted on the Cumberland County Public Utilities website, located at [http://www.co.cumberland.nc.us/public\\_utilities.aspx](http://www.co.cumberland.nc.us/public_utilities.aspx)

## **How are County crews recognizable in the field?**

Cumberland County personnel carry identification badges and operate from vehicles with proper signage for ease of recognition.

## **What is the purpose of smoke testing?**

The purpose of the testing is to find potential points of inflow and infiltration in the sanitary sewer system. Smoke testing can help locate improper connections to the systems and areas where unwanted water is entering the system. If a problem is found, Cumberland County will formulate necessary improvements to fix it.

## **What is the benefit to the County for performing a Smoke Test?**

Smoke testing is one technique utilized to identify sections of sewers that may exhibit inflow during heavy rainfall. Smoke testing is best used to detect inflow sources such as roof downspouts, driveway, yard and area drains, foundation drains, faulty connections, and storm water drainage system cross connections. It can also detect structural damages and leaking joints in sewer pipes.

## **Is the smoke that is used hazardous?**

The smoke that comes out of the vent stacks on houses or holes in the ground is non-toxic, harmless. It does not create a fire hazard. The Fire Departments will be made aware of the test areas and schedule.

## **Do residents have to do anything to prepare their homes for Smoke Testing?**

When you receive a notice that smoke testing will take place, you should check to see that all plumbing drain traps are filled with water to prevent the smoke from entering the building. Run the faucet for 30-60 seconds or pour about 3 cups of water in floor and sink drains, filling the traps. Make sure to check seldom used floor drains and plumbing fixtures in your home. If smoke does enter, the resident should consult a licensed plumber. If smoke from the testing can enter through faulty plumbing, the potential exists for dangerous sewer gases to also enter the home.

## **Does the resident need to be home when the Smoke Testing is performed?**

Homeowners do not need to be home and at no time will field crews need to enter the residence. Field inspectors will be documenting the testing, taking photos and measuring distances so that the defects may be found at a later date and repaired.

## **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 sewer gas to enter.

## **What should I do if smoke gets into the house?**

If smoke does enter your home, note the location of the smoke and contact a licensed plumber.

## **If smoke gets into the house, how long does it take the smoke to dissipate?**

Open windows for ventilation. The smoke will dissipate in a few minutes.

## **What happens after the smoke testing has been completed?**

The County will notify residents who need to make corrections with a letter explaining the nature of the defect found and ways to correct it. Again, most corrections can be easy fixes, such as disconnecting a downspout from the ground and letting the water flow above ground away from the home.

## **Contact Information**

For more information, please call the Cumberland County Public Utilities Division at 678-7682.