

Frequently Asked Questions - Sanitary Sewer Vapour Testing

What is vapour testing?

Vapour testing consists of blowing artificially produced vapour that resembles smoke, into the sanitary sewer system and observing where the vapour exits the system, in order to locate deficiencies and areas of the sewer system that need upgrading. Vapour is expected to exit from manholes and the sewer vent stack of houses in the area; however, vapour seen exiting from your yard suggests a possible break in the sewer line.

What is the purpose of vapour testing?

The purpose of the 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 vapour testing?

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

Is the vapour harmful?

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

What should I do to prepare for the 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 vapour 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 test setup takes about 30 minutes to complete. Most homes will only be in the test area for one or two tests.

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Do I have to be home during the test?

No. Inspection crews will not need to enter your home to complete the vapour test.

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

The vapour 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 vapour enter the building. If you have proper connections and all of the traps have water in them, there should not be any problems.

Will vapour testing allow vapour 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 should I do if vapour gets into the house?

Exit your home immediately and notify the testing crew. The vapour is not harmful; however, it is an indicator there are deficiencies in your home's plumbing system that may be allowing sewer gases in to your house. Please keep in mind, the vapour may be due to a real fire and not from the test. **If you have any doubts as to the origin of the vapour, please call 911.**

Can vapour activate smoke alarms?

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

Will my sewer services be interrupted during the testing?

No. There will be no interruptions to your sewer service as a result of this testing.

Will there be traffic interruptions during the testing?

City staff will be accessing manholes and working on your street; however, traffic interruptions and delays are not anticipated during this project. We ask that you be mindful of work activities in your area at all times.

