
Heidelberg Heights

Smoke Testing – Fact Sheet

What is smoke testing?

Smoke testing is a process to find leaks in the sewer system that serves your neighborhood. A leak in a sewer system can be a major problem because it allows rainwater into the sewer, which can cause sewer overflows during storms. This adds a lot of cost to run the sewer system (and drives your rates up) and can harm the environment too.

Smoke testing works by pumping smoke into the sewer line, and then looking for where the smoke comes up. The smoke will naturally flow through and leaks and will surface wherever there are leaks.

Smoke-testing is non-toxic, non-flammable and safe!

Why is LCA smoke testing in my neighborhood?

LCA will be traveling to many neighborhoods throughout the service area to conduct smoke testing. Your neighborhood was selected for this project because earlier studies have found a high volume of rainwater enters the sewer system in your area, which means we think we will find leaks we can repair right away.

What happens during smoke testing?

LCA's contractor Keystone Consulting Engineers will come to your neighborhood and set up work sites at various sewer manholes on your street. They will pump smoke into the sewer lines and then visually inspect the area to see if any of the smoke comes up to the surface.

Smoke may appear anywhere there is a leak in the system because it flows through the cracked pipe and will rise through the soil to be visible above the surface. Smoke may also appear where there is a connection to the system that should not be there, such as roof leaders, sump pump pits, or possibly floor drains.

Any smoke that comes up will be white and will dissipate within 10-15 minutes. The smoke has a mild odor to it but will not smell like burning smoke.

How do I prepare for smoke testing?

If you are using the plumbing in your home on a regular basis (e.g. sinks, toilets, etc.), the plumbing system should have water trapped in the drains – that's how modern plumbing systems are designed. As a result, smoke should NOT enter your home through normal sewer connections such as toilets, sinks and showers.

However, if you have any plumbing fixtures that you do not use regularly, you may wish to run some water through those drains to ensure the trap has water in it.

Otherwise, if smoke enters your home through a sink drain that does not get used often, it will not hurt you.

Remember, the smoke is safe and is not a fire hazard!

What should I do if I see smoke?

You may see smoke in a variety of locations:

- In the street, around manholes
- Along the curb line or cracks in the sidewalk
- At your sewer cap or in your yard (which may indicate a sewer lateral needs to be repaired)
- Coming out of a roof leader (if it is connected to the sewer system – this is an unauthorized connection that needs to be disconnected!)
- Coming up from a floor drain or a sump pump drain line (also an unauthorized connection that should be disconnected!)
- From your sewer vent pipe in your roof
- From a cracked sewer line inside your home

If you see smoke, look outside for the crews from Keystone Consulting Engineers to make sure it is our project.

If you see our crews and believe the smoke is from the project, you do not need to do anything. If the odor is bothersome, open a window to allow the smoke to dissipate faster.

If the smoke is on your property or inside your home, take note of where you saw the smoke, so you can investigate any repairs that may be necessary!

Thank you for your help & cooperation!