

Charlotte County Smoke Testing Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is smoke testing?

Smoke testing involves blowing non-toxic smoke into the sanitary sewer system to locate defects that would allow stormwater to enter the system. You may see smoke coming from vent stacks on buildings or holes in the ground. The smoke varies in color from white to gray. The smoke that is being used is manufactured especially for this application and is non-toxic and non-staining. Smoke should not enter your home or business unless the plumbing is not functioning properly. If you have any seldom used drains and floor drains, please pour water in the drain to fill the trap prior to the test. If smoke does enter a home or business, opening of windows and doors should quickly dissipate the smoke.

2. How does smoke testing work?

Field crews blow air and smoke into the sanitary sewer system through a sanitary sewer manhole and monitor where smoke escapes the system. The smoke under pressure will fill the main line as well as any connections and then follow the path of any leak to the ground surface, quickly revealing the source of the problem.

3. What are the benefits of smoke testing?

Smoke testing is the most efficient and cost-effective way to locate and identify where unauthorized water is entering the public portion of the sewer system and find areas of the sewer system that need improvement. Smoke testing is becoming a requirement nationwide for locating unauthorized water problems that are threatening the ability to properly treat wastewater.

4. How long will the testing take?

Crews may be in your area for several hours, but the actual testing typically takes between 45 and 60 minutes.

5. What should residents do?

The testing should not affect your home/business, or your sanitary sewer service. Home and business owners do not need to be present during the testing, which will be performed during normal business hours. However, you **MUST POUR WATER DOWN SELDOM USED DRAINS PRIOR TO THE TESTING** – especially any floor drains in your home/business. This should prevent smoke from entering and setting off smoke alarms unnecessarily. Residents and businesses should be aware that some smoke may enter a home/business if the vent stack is blocked, or a sewer connection is dry. If you detect smoke, don't be alarmed as the smoke is harmless and will dissipate after several minutes. Please open windows and doors to help dissipate the smoke and report it to the crews conducting the tests in your neighborhood.

IMPORTANT – If there is any individual in your home or business who has respiratory problems and/or mobility limitations, please notify the project representative by calling [941-421-7880](tel:941-421-7880) or emailing projectinfo@WWSAssessment.com prior to testing.

6. What should I do if smoke enters my home or business?

Do Not Be Alarmed. Open windows to all ventilation and note the location of the smoke emission. Smoke will clear within a few minutes. Exit the building and notify the smoke testing personnel in the area. IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBT AS TO THE SOURCE OF THE SMOKE IN YOUR HOME OR YARD, PLEASE CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY.

7. Does the smoke used have an odor?

The smoke has a distinctive but not unpleasant odor. Visibility and odor last only a few minutes with adequate ventilation.

8. Why do you recommend evacuating the structure?

The smoke is safe, non-toxic, non-staining, and harmless to you, children, pets, plants, food, materials, and creates no fire hazard. Those with respiratory conditions should take special precautions.

9. If the smoke is not harmful, why do you recommend evacuating the structure?

Evacuating is a precautionary measure in case the smoke is due to a real fire rather than a test, and since smoke in your house from this test indicates other sewer gases may also be entering the building.

10. What should I do if I have emphysema or respiratory problems? Is the smoke harmful?

Although the smoke is considered to have no adverse health effects, individuals with respiratory conditions should take special precautions. Smoke rarely enters a home, but you could sit outside for the duration of the smoke test (20 min). If you cannot sit outside, open the windows and shut your bathroom doors. Also, call the number on the flyer prior to testing.

11. I am a pet owner and will not be home during the testing.

The smoke is not harmful to pets. If possible, leave pets in a room without any plumbing fixtures and with the door closed to isolate them from any smoke that may enter the house.

12. What does it mean if smoke enters my house?

If smoke enters your home during the test, it may indicate there are deficiencies in the plumbing that may allow potentially dangerous sewer gases to enter. Plumbing fixtures in your home or business are connected to the sanitary sewer, therefore there is potential for smoke to enter if the drains are not connected properly. This happens particularly under the following circumstances:

- The vents connected to your building's sewer pipes are inadequate, defective, or improperly installed.
- The traps under sinks, tubs, basins, etc. are dry, defective, or improperly installed.
- The pipes, connections, or seals in the wastewater drain system in and/or under your building are damaged, defective, have plugs missing, or are improperly installed.
- 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 gases to enter the home.

13. Do I have to be home during the test to give testing staff access? How will I know if smoke enters my house?

No, inspection crews will not need to enter your home. The purpose of the smoke test is to identify sources of rain or ground water entering the sewer system.

14. Can the smoke testing activate the smoke alarm?

Yes, smoke alarms may activate during smoke testing if the home/business is not properly plumbed, or if the water traps are dry. If possible, open windows and/or doors for ventilation. If you have any doubt of the source of the smoke, please call 911.

15. Who do I contact for more information?

If you have questions about the project or concerns during testing, please contact the project representative at **941-421-7880** or email to projectinfo@WWSAssessment.com.

You can also contact the Charlotte County Utilities Public Relations Manager, Stu Gooden, by email at Stu.Gooden@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.