

The Flow

WORKING TOGETHER
TO IMPROVE WATER
QUALITY & SERVICE

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Protecting our Sewer System: Smoke Testing in Action

What is Smoke Testing?

Smoke testing is the industry standard method of identifying sources of surface inflow to the sanitary sewer, which leads to reduced efficiency of local sewer treatment plants.

A smoke test uses non-toxic smoke and high-capacity blowers to blow smoke through the sanitary sewer pipes. During the smoke test, crews will walk around the neighborhood and note any faults in the system where smoke is coming out of the ground. There should not be any smoke that enters the home if the homeowner's sewer connections are working properly. In the unusual event of smoke entering the home, it means there is an open fault, where sewer gas has been entering the home for an unknown period of time. While the smoke from the smoke test is harmless, the sewer gas is poisonous and highly dangerous to residents. Because of this, it is imperative that homeowners address these issues quickly. See the pictures below of examples of broken cleanouts.



Maintenance Tip

Check your cleanout cap once a season. Because they are often located near lawns, they are frequently cracked by lawnmowers or become buried under mulch. If yours is white PVC, ensure it isn't "sun-rotted" and brittle; if it's old brass or iron, make sure it isn't rusted shut. Replacing a damaged cap costs about \$10 at a hardware store — a tiny price to pay for protecting your entire home.

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While they might look like nothing more than a plastic or metal lid in your yard, sewer cleanout caps are actually a critical line of defense for your home's plumbing system.

This small component serves three vital roles that can save you thousands of dollars in repairs.

1. The Gateway for Maintenance

The sewer cleanout is the direct access point to your main sewer line. If your house suffers a major backup, this is where a plumber inserts a motorized snake or a hydro-jetting hose to clear the blockage. Without a functional, accessible cap, finding and opening this line during an emergency becomes a time-consuming (and expensive) nightmare.

2. Keeping the Outside Out

A missing or cracked cap is an open invitation for debris. Rocks, dirt, leaves, and trash can fall into the pipe, creating the very blockages the cleanout is meant to help fix. Even worse, an open pipe allows rodents and insects to enter your plumbing system or provides an easy entry point for tree roots seeking a water source.

3. Preventing "Sewer Gas" and Backups

Your sewer system relies on specific pressure levels. An airtight cap prevents foul-smelling sewer gases from wafting into your yard or back into your home. Furthermore, during heavy rain, an open cleanout can allow surface water to flood your sewer line, potentially overwhelming your pipes and causing a sewage backup into your lowest drains (like a basement shower or floor drain).



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