

Sewer Odors

What is that smell?

Hydrogen sulfide gas is naturally produced by bacteria breaking down waste. It smells like rotten eggs. Homes and businesses that have properly functioning plumbing should not experience wastewater odors indoors because of ventilation on the roof.



Roof vents properly working during testing

Why do I smell sewer gas in my home?

Here are some situations that could cause there to be wastewater odor in your home:

Dry or non-existent drain traps



Used water is "trapped" in the curve due to the shape creating a block that prevents sewer gas from going back up the pipe.

If the wastewater smell is coming from a particular fixture or room, chances are there is a dry drain trap, or one was not installed. Dry traps are especially common in infrequently used water fixtures or homes that have been vacant for a period of time. Dry traps can also allow for insects to come into your home.

Solution: If the fixture is a sink, look under the sink and see if the drain pipe looks like

the image below. If it does, try running some water down the drain to see if that stops the smell (about a half of a gallon). If you are unable to look under or in a fixture to see if there is a drain trap, try sending water down the drain anyway. If you can tell there is no drain trap, a plumber can install one for you. If the dry trap was causing insects to come up the drain, try pouring one cup of vinegar down.

Blocked/broken/cracked/deteriorated wastewater pipes

Wastewater pipes in the home can be found in floors, walls and ceilings. Pipes with defects could allow for wastewater gas or even sewage to leak from them. Defects could be from rust, corrosion, holes or improper installation. [Blockages](#) in homes could be caused by grease or objects that shouldn't have gone down the drain.

Solution: A plumber can detect the location of the problem pipe using a camera or smoke testing. The problem pipe can be replaced, or the blockage removed using water jetting.

Broken seals under toilets



Toilet seals are gaskets made of a ring of wax that sits on the floor. It stops water and wastewater gas from leaking into your home. The wax seals can wear out. If you notice that the toilet moves side to side, if there is water leaking from the bottom of the toilet, or if the toilet is more than 20 years old, it may be time for a new seal.

Solution: You can buy a replacement wax seal at a hardware store for very little cost. Replacing the seal is a fairly simple [process](#) but you can also call a plumber to do it for you.

Dried out water seals on a floor drain

Floor drains are most commonly found in the bathrooms, basements, laundry rooms, and kitchens of commercial buildings. They are designed to remove standing water that may spill out on the floor. These drains can become dry and allow sewer gas and insects to enter the building. Dirt and debris can also clog the drain.

Solution: Make sure the drain trap is not dry by pouring water down the drain to re-establish the block needed to keep sewer odors from escaping (about a half of a gallon). If a drain trap has not been installed or you think there is a blockage in the drain, you can contact a plumber for help. If the dry trap was causing insects to come up the drain, try pouring one cup of vinegar down.

Problems with the wastewater vent on the roof

Vents on the roof is where wastewater gas escapes the home. If the vents are blocked or were not properly installed, there isn't anywhere else for wastewater gas to go except inside your home. Blocked wastewater vents can also affect the pressure of your plumbing and be the cause of slow drains in the home. A single slow drain usually indicates a blockage in the single drain, however if all the drains in your home are draining slow it could be caused by problems with the roof vents.

Solution: Check all the roof vents to make sure they are free of things like leaves, nests, trash, snow, ice, etc. Check the integrity of the vents and make sure they are not loose, broken, or corroded. If you suspect an issue with the ventilation, you can call a plumber.

Natural gas leak

Natural gas is odorless, colorless and tasteless. However, utility companies add the chemical mercaptan to it. Mercaptan contains sulfur which causes the natural gas to smell like wastewater gas, a rotten egg smell.

Solution: Call 1-800-815-0083 to report a natural gas leak.

Can JIPSD help me?

When a resident calls JIPSD to report a wastewater odor we will collect information pertaining to the location and times the odor occurs. JIPSD only owns and maintains the wastewater mains (typically located in the roadway) and does not perform any work on privately owned wastewater service lines. We can send a field technician out to verify there is no damage or blockage to our wastewater main by checking manholes and access points. If no problem is found with the JIPSD wastewater main, the resident will be notified that the odor is caused by something in the home (see potential sources of odor listed above). The resident can request JIPSD perform a sewer investigation (smoke test) to help them locate the source of the odor in their home. The cost for this service can be found [here](#). JIPSD does not provide plumbing services and cannot make any repairs to privately owned property.