

Information about Sewer Line Smoke Testing

The Town of Hillsborough periodically conducts smoke testing of sewer pipes. This is done to identify sources of inflow or infiltration from rain, surface water or groundwater. These can cause sewage overflows, damaging the environment and costing the town and sewer customers money.

The “smoke” used for testing is not a fire hazard and is a nontoxic, low-odor, water-based vapor. The color is white or gray, and it will not stain surfaces it comes in contact with.

During the testing, smoke is blown into the sewer system through manholes to help utilities employees search for cracks and broken pipes that typically wouldn’t be seen otherwise. The smoke appears where problems are, such as the ground, manholes, storm sewer catch basins, yard drains, road cracks, private sewer laterals or sewer cleanouts.

Smoke indoors

Smoke from roof vents is normal, but if smoke is found indoors or in yards during testing, call the Hillsborough Water Distribution and Wastewater Collection Division at 919-732-9459 to have the problem investigated.

Smoke indoors during testing could indicate a dry trap in a sink or a bathtub that is not used frequently. If this is the case, running water through the drain will fill the trap and stop the smoke. In other cases, customers who find smoke indoors during testing may be advised to call a plumber to make repairs. The smoke could be an indication of a bad joint, a broken pipe, a cross connection between storm and sanitary sewer lines or a missing cleanout cap.

Town and customer responsibilities

Customers will be notified by the town of private connection issues that require repair. The town will address issues with public sewer lines. The following are not permitted and must be disconnected immediately: roof drain, yard drain, sump pump or other connections to the sanitary sewer system that are not related to wastewater.

For town and customer responsibilities, please see the town Code of Ordinances, sections [14-21](#) and [14-22](#).

For more information, contact Utility Maintenance Supervisor Al Robertson at 919-732-9459.



Smoke testing of sewer lines found storm gutters erroneously connected to the town’s sewer system on this house.