

FACT SHEET

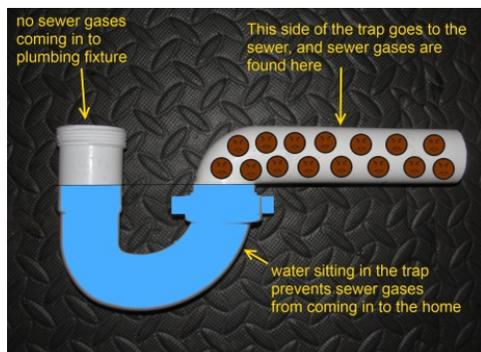
Sewer Gas

What is sewer gas?

Sewer gas is a complex mixture of toxic and non-toxic gases that can be present at varying levels depending on the source. It is produced and collected in sewage systems by the decomposition of organic household or industrial wastes. Highly toxic components of sewer gas include hydrogen sulfide and ammonia.

How are we exposed to sewer gas?

Sewer gas is typically restricted from entering buildings through plumbing traps that create a water seal at potential points of entry. In addition, plumbing vents allow sewer gases to be exhausted outdoors. Infrequently used plumbing fixtures may allow sewer gas to enter a home due to a “dry trap” caused by the evaporation of water in the trap, especially in dry weather. The result is the most common means of sewer gas entering buildings and can be solved easily by using the fixtures regularly or by adding water to their drains.



One of the most common traps to dry out are floor drains such as those typically placed near home furnaces and water heaters. Infrequently used utility sinks, tubs, showers and bathrooms are also common culprits.

Exposure to sewer gas also can happen if the gas seeps in via a leaking plumbing drain or vent pipe, or even through cracks in a building's foundation. Sewer gas is typically denser than atmospheric gases and may accumulate in basements, but may eventually mix with surrounding air.

In most homes, sewer gas may have a slightly unpleasant odor, but does not often pose a significant health hazard. Symptoms of headache, nausea, dizziness, or drowsiness may indicate exposure to an odorless gas like methane or carbon monoxide, or to hydrogen sulfite, which smells of rotten eggs. Persons experiencing severe symptoms should seek immediate medical care.

How can I avoid being exposed to sewer gas?

- Flush floor and sink drains with water to prevent the traps from drying out
- Occasionally check the plumbing vents to ensure they are free from debris

What should I do if I suspect a problem?

First, following the odor, try to locate the point of entry, such as a basement floor drain. Check for blocked plumbing gas vents. Add water to the floor drain or remove debris from plumbing stack vent on a regular basis to help prevent sewer gas from entering your home.