



Ross Valley Sanitary District

Smoke Testing Program

Begins November 2011

Residents to Be Notified Prior to Tests

Ross Valley Sanitary District (RVSD) will begin a Smoke Testing program to identify defects in and improper connections to the sewer system. Smoke Testing, an industry standard for testing sewer systems, is an efficient, cost-effective, and safe way to locate sources where storm water infiltrates the system. The smoke, which is blown into sewer pipes, escapes anywhere there is a damaged pipe or problem connection.

The white smoke is manufactured specifically for this type of testing. It is EPA endorsed and is a non-toxic, non-staining substance that is generally considered to be harmless to humans, pets, food, and material items. The specific product being used by RVSD has been employed successfully for over 30 years throughout the United States.

The Importance of Smoke Testing

Each year millions of gallons of unwanted storm water infiltrates our sanitary sewers and can overload the pipe system, pump stations, and treatment plant. The RVSD sanitary sewer system, which serves homes and business in our community, is designed for wastewater only. The community has a separate storm water drainage system with a network of pipes to channel storm water into creeks, waterways, and the San Francisco Bay. The infiltration of storm water to the sanitary sewer system can cause or contribute to an overflow of untreated wastewater that has the potential to damage the environment and property as well as pose a threat to public health.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How is Smoke Testing performed?** The smoke testing process involves isolating manageable sections of the sewer system and then blowing smoke through the sections. If there are any defects in the main sewer pipes, private sewer laterals (the pipes that connect homes and businesses to the public pipes), or if there are illegal storm drain cross connections, the smoke will rise to the surface and reveal these problems. RVSD will carefully document its findings and assist property owners should there be a problem on their property.
2. **How will people be notified about tests?** Two weeks prior to testing, RVSD will mail a notification to homes and businesses in the area to be tested. A second notice will be hand delivered 1-2 days prior to testing. RVSD plans to test from May through October each year, depending on weather conditions. The test schedules and test locations will be also be posted on the District's website.
3. **How to prepare for Smoke Testing?** Water can evaporate from P-traps of unused plumbing fixtures. A "P-trap" is the curved drainpipe (easily seen under a sink or other plumbing fixture), which is designed to hold water and prevent air, odors and, in this instance, smoke from entering the building. Therefore, the day prior to any testing, pour water down all drains that are not

regularly used. This will ensure that the P-traps are full and block smoke from entering the home or business.

4. **Is the smoke harmful? What if smoke comes out of a plumbing fixture?** Although the product is generally considered to have no adverse health effects, individuals with pre-existing conditions such as emphysema or other heart/lung problems should take special precautions to either vacate the building during the test period or, if not possible, keep doors and windows open so that if, on the rare occasion, smoke does enter, it will dissipate rapidly. These individuals should also notify the District prior to testing so that any special precautions can be taken prior to testing. If smoke appears in a home or office, first open windows for ventilation, then notify our Smoke Testing crewmembers if they are still in your area or call RVSD at 415-259-2949.
5. **Is there a need to be present during a Smoke Test?** There is no need to be at your home or office. Some sewer lines are located in backyard easements. Whenever these lines require investigation, members of our inspection crews will access easements for the sewer lines and manholes.
6. **How long are Smoke Tests?** The actual test for each home or business takes about 15-30 minutes. While testing, smoke may be seen around manhole covers, storm drains, roof vents and areas of defects. Smoke will not enter the home or business if all plumbing is installed properly and is in good repair.
7. **Are pets safe?** The smoke is not harmful to pets. The smoke used is a non-toxic substance that is harmless to humans, pets, food, and material items. If smoke does enter the building, it will clear in a few minutes with proper ventilation.
8. **What if smoke enters the building?** If smoke enters the interior of homes or offices, windows and doors should be opened. The smoke will usually clear in 15-20 minutes. If building occupants are present during testing and smoke enters the building, they should inform a member of the testing crew or call RVSD at 415-259-2949.
9. **Can smoke clog the sewer?** There is no way smoke can clog up a sewer. The smoke is made up of a vaporous substance similar to fog.
10. **Are Police and Fire aware of the Smoke Testing?** RVSD will notify Police and Fire prior to testing. The District will also update Police and Fire on a daily basis with test locations. In addition, RVSD will provide the Public Works Department with test information and daily updates.
11. **What happens after the test?** After all data is collected and analyzed, RVSD staff will begin notifying property owners if there appears to be a problem with their sewer lateral, storm drain cross connection, and/or a leak. Staff will help owners understand any issue and how the problem might be resolved.
12. **Who to contact for more information and/or a problem?**
 - Ross Valley Sanitary District at 415-259-2949
 - Visit our website at www.rvsd.org
 - Visit the smoke testing website at www.smoketesting.com