

Water Vapor Testing- Frequently Asked Questions

What is Water Vapor Testing?

Water Vapor Testing is a common practice where water vapor is released into sewer pipes to help crews locate leaks and pipe connection issues.

How does it work?

The water vapor is blown into the sewer system so crews can visually track where it comes out through sewer vents, maintenance holes, and the ground. During this process, it is possible that vapor will make its way into your home through drains connected to the sewer system.



Why is Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) doing this?

This is a first step in gathering additional information about the sewer system layout. Once data is collected, SPU teams will use the information to develop workable neighborhood solutions for sewer overflows.

Who conducts the testing?

Trained SPU staff or contractors working on behalf of SPU. All crews carry identification and work vehicles will be marked. Crews will be working on the streets in front of homes and businesses.

It looks like smoke. Is that normal?

Do not be alarmed! The water vapor may look like smoke, but it is a safe, non-toxic, non-staining water-based vapor. Vapor from sewer vent stacks located on the roof is normal. Vapor from the yard, foundation, gutters, or downspouts may indicate improper or damaged sewer connections. Crews will document these findings, and SPU will follow up if needed.



How to Prepare for Water Vapor Testing

How will I know when my street will be tested?

You will receive a door hanger 1-2 days before the inspection is expected to begin.

How long will it take?

Testing is quick. Most locations are tested for a few minutes at a time. Crews typically move through a neighborhood over several hours.

Should I do anything to prepare?

To prevent the water vapor from entering your home, residents are advised to run water for 30 seconds in all sinks, baths, and showers, and pour water into exposed floor drains in the morning before testing begins. This ensures that drains are filled with water, which acts as a seal to prevent vapor from traveling through the drain into a house.

Do I need to be home?

No. Testing occurs in the public sewer system. You will not need to be home during testing, and no one will be entering your property.

Is it safe for people, plants, pets, etc.?

Yes. The water vapor is non-toxic, non-staining, and may have a mild odor.

What if I need to speak with someone during the testing period?

Crews and field representatives will be onsite in the unlikely event that any issues may arise. You may also contact SPU's emergency Operations Response Center (ORC) at (206) 386-1800.

If Water Vapor enters your home

There is water vapor inside my home. What do I do?

You may notice vapor in your coming through the sink or roof. Most homes and buildings will not experience vapor indoors. If you detect or smell water vapor inside your house or building, open doors or windows to increase ventilation. Any odor or visible vapor should only last a few minutes.

What if I have smoke alarms or sprinkler systems?

The vapor does not activate standard smoke detectors or fire sprinklers. If you have a specialized fire detection system, contact SPU using the phone number on your door hanger or notice.

The water vapor is not clearing from inside my house. What do I do?

If water vapor continues to enter your building, even after you pour water down the drains, please consider contacting a licensed plumber to investigate potential plumbing issues. You may also notify on-site field representatives or contact SPU's Operations Response Center (ORC) at (206) 386-1800 for assistance.

Additional Info

Is this the same as “smoke testing”?

Yes, the industry has used the term “smoke testing”. SPU uses “Water Vapor Testing” as it is a more accurate description.

Where can I find more information?

You can learn more about Drainage and Wastewater by visiting the [Shape Our Water website](#) or the [Your Side Sewer website](#).