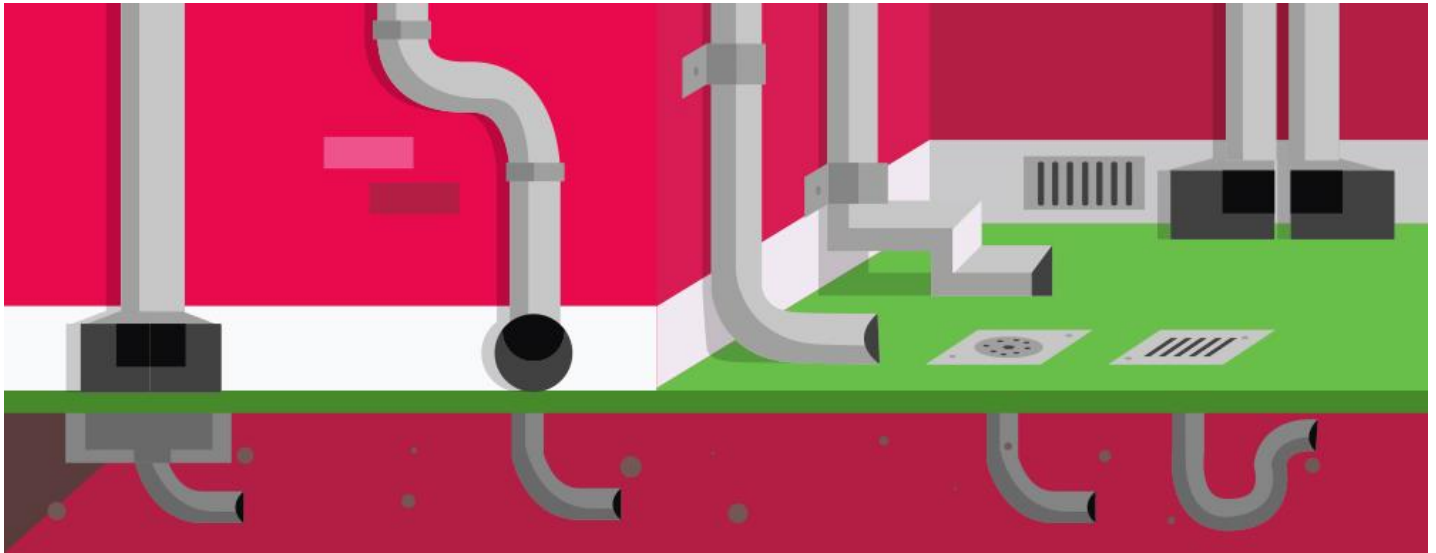


A Guide to Smoke Testing and what it means for you

Council is about to begin a smoke testing programme in Westport. This work will be undertaken by WestReef Services staff at various manhole locations around the network. Below are some FAQs that have been compiled to help provide more information on this project.



What is smoke testing?

Smoke testing involves forcing a dense, non-toxic and odourless smoke into the wastewater (sewer) system at a manhole. The smoke fills the main sewer pipe and any connected pipes, and follows the path of any breaks in pipework to the ground surface. Smoke testing staff monitor where smoke escapes the system. The purpose of smoke testing is to identify areas within the wastewater network that need attention.

Why does Council smoke test?

Our wastewater network is designed to collect wastewater from homes and businesses, not rainwater and other surface water.

When other water enters the wastewater network, it can overwhelm the capacity of the network (especially in heavy rain events). This can result in overflows of diluted untreated wastewater into the river and harbour and can have a harmful effect on our environment.

Excessive stormwater that arrives at the wastewater treatment facility can also wash away the special bugs that treat our wastewater. This affects our treatment processes.

Smoke testing identifies breaks in pipes and manholes as well as locations where stormwater and other surface water can get into the wastewater system (also known as a cross-connection).

This helps us to keep faults to a minimum and unnecessary water out of wastewater, which in turn helps keep wastewater treatment costs down. Smoke testing is common practice around New Zealand.

How will I know that smoke testing will be taking place in my area?

Before each new round of smoke testing, we notify the residents who may be affected. We do this by:

- Sending a letter to all houses in the area selected for testing
- Advertising in the newspaper or local newsletters
- Posting on Council and community Facebook groups

We also advise the fire service that works will be undertaken.

Is the smoke harmful to me or my pets?

No. The “smoke” is not true smoke. It is a harmless white vapour – the same non-toxic substance used in smoke machines at concerts. It is considered safe for humans, animals and plants, leaves no residue or stains, is not a fire hazard and will disappear rapidly without leaving an odour.

Since any vapour can be an irritant, direct contact with the smoke may cause minor respiratory irritation in some people. People with respiratory problems such as chronic asthma or emphysema should avoid direct exposure to the smoke.

Please contact Council, phone 788 9111 or WestReef Services Ltd, phone 788 9090, to discuss your situation further if you have concerns about upcoming smoke testing.

Will the smoke get into my home?

Smoke appearing in your home may indicate that there is a problem with your plumbing. We suggest you contact a licensed plumber to inspect and make necessary repairs if you see smoke in your home during our testing.

If your plumbing is installed and working properly, your U-traps will prevent smoke entering your home.

A U-trap is a U-shaped section of your drain pipe that is always full of water. The water acts as a barrier, preventing sewer gases from getting into your home through sinks and drains. If there is no water in the trap, it will not work properly.

Dry traps are most often found in floor drains and bathroom drains that aren't used often. Please thoroughly check your home. We recommend running some water into building drains and fixtures before smoke testing to replenish any water that may have been lost over time.

How may smoke enter my house?

Because your plumbing is connected to the sewers, smoke may enter your home or workplace if:

- Vents connected to your building's sewer pipes are inadequate, defective, or improperly installed.
- Traps under sinks, tubs, basins, showers and other drains are dry, defective, improperly installed, or missing.
- Pipes, connections and seals of the wastewater drain system in and under your buildings are damaged, defective, have plugs missing, or are improperly installed.

What if smoke gets into my house?

- Do not be alarmed.
- Open windows to allow ventilation and note where the smoke is coming from; it will clear in a few minutes.

- Leave your home and notify smoke testing personnel in the area. This is precautionary until we confirm that the smoke is from our testing and is not indicative of fire.
- Remember, if smoke enters your home during the test, there may be problems with your plumbing. These problems could allow potentially dangerous sewer gas to enter. Please contact your plumber immediately.

If you have any doubt as to the source of the smoke in your home or property and suspect a fire, please call 111.

What should I do to prepare for smoke testing?

- Ensure all drain U-traps contain water by running some water into all drains and fixtures before smoke testing. This is particularly important for floor drains and bathroom drains that aren't often used.
- Flush all toilets.
- If there is an individual in your home or business with respiratory problems and/or mobility limitations, or if you have any additional questions, please contact WestReef Services Ltd, phone 788 9090, or Buller District Council, phone 788 9111.

How will I know if smoke enters my house if I am not home during the testing?

Smoke testing focuses on the public part of the sewer system which Council maintains. While the testing can also identify plumbing problems on private property, this is not the main intent of the smoke test. It is the homeowner's responsibility to maintain private plumbing connections. Please contact your plumber if you have any concerns about plumbing on your property.

Can the smoke testing activate smoke alarms?

Yes, smoke alarms may be activated during smoke testing. If possible, open windows and/or doors for ventilation.

If you have any doubts about the origin of the smoke, call 111.

Why can't you tell me in advance exactly what date my home will be tested?

We can't do smoke testing when it's rainy or very windy, so the weather can sometimes cause delays. Also, other activities in the project may take less time than expected, so it can sometimes be sooner than expected. However, we will let you know the period in which we will be smoke testing your area by mail.

Where does the smoke appear?

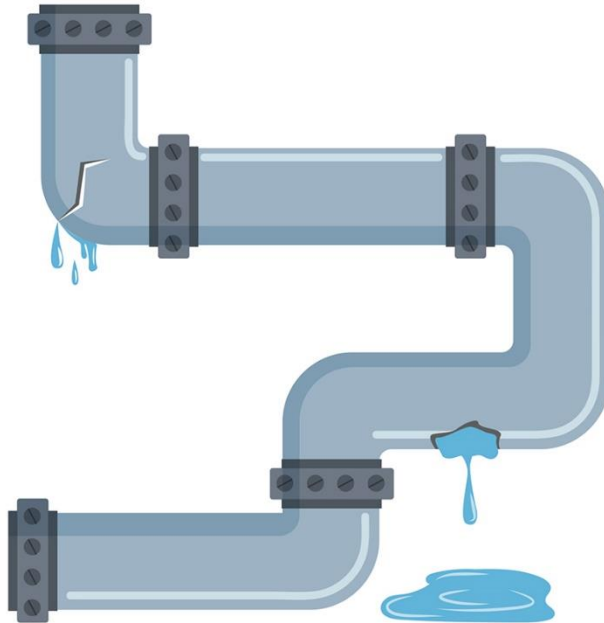
Smoke will be seen coming from sewer vents (also known as terminal vents) on roofs of homes. This is normal and indicates that smoke has filled the sewers. Smoke may also be seen coming from building foundations, manhole covers, or cleared sections with existing sewer connections.

Can the smoke block the sewer?

No, the smoke is a vapour and cannot block the sewer.

What happens after the smoke testing is completed?

Council will use the findings to help plan future public infrastructure improvement projects and to identify changes required to stop storm water and other surface water from getting into the sanitary sewer system. Depending on the findings, we may also undertake immediate repairs to the sewer system.



For any queries or further information regarding smoke testing, please contact Customer Services on 03 788 9111 or WestReef Services Ltd on 03 788 9090.