
Petroleum Company Offers Free Sewer Trap Inspections

Pleasant Street Investigation

Detroit, Michigan

February 2011

Community meeting

EPA will hold a meeting to discuss odor problems and what can be done about them. The meeting will be 6 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2011, at The Rollercade, 2130 S. Schaefer Highway, Detroit.

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 has been investigating odor complaints in basements near the intersection of Pleasant and Liebold streets in Detroit. Experts believe sewer gas is causing the odors. Marathon Petroleum Co. LLC is offering to inspect home plumbing systems and fix problems that may be allowing sewer gas to enter homes near the Marathon refinery (*see map back page*). To register for an inspection call 313-843-9100 and press 0 or sign up at a community meeting scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 22 (*see box at left*). The inspections and repairs will be carried out at no cost to residents or homeowners.

Causes of sewer gas

Sewer gas is a complex mixture of toxic and nontoxic gases produced and collected in sewage systems by the breakdown of household and industrial wastes. Sewer gases include hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, methane, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Sewer gas is usually prevented from entering homes by plumbing traps that create a water seal at places where the gas may come in, such as basement floor drains (*see illustration back page*).

Older plumbing fixtures may let sewer gas enter a home when the water in the trap dries out. This is common in dry weather, but it can happen anytime. Gas can also enter when the sewer line into your home cracks.

In addition to normal sewage, the sewer system in the neighborhood of Pleasant and Liebold streets transports industrial wastewater from Marathon's refinery located at 1300 S. Fort Street, Detroit, under a permit with the city. This wastewater contains low levels of compounds such as benzene, 2-butanone, chloroform, ethylbenzene, naphthalene, toluene, trimethylbenzene, and xylene. Some of these compounds, including benzene, have been found in basements where plumbing traps are not working correctly.

Health effects of petroleum compounds

Benzene: Being around petroleum compounds such as benzene for a short amount of time can cause irritated eyes, a cough or sore throat and shortness of breath. Being around low levels of benzene for a longer time may harm a person's ability to make blood cells and fight infections. Breathing in high levels of benzene for many years can cause cancer in some people.

Hydrogen sulfide: Sewer gas has a "rotten egg" smell because it contains hydrogen sulfide. People who are around low levels of hydrogen sulfide for a short amount of time can have irritated eyes, a cough or sore throat and shortness of breath. Being around low levels of hydrogen sulfide for a long time may cause tiredness, pneumonia, loss of appetite, headaches, irritability, poor memory and dizziness.



Inspection Area

