

Environmental Odors: What You Should Know

Information for Los Angeles County Residents



This is a general fact sheet about environmental odors, what they may mean, and who to contact if you notice a strong or persistent odor.

In some situations, such as cleanup activities following large building fires involving food storage, temporary odors may occur if refrigerated food is not removed before it spoils.

Key Messages

- Environmental odors can come from many different sources.
- Odor alone is generally not enough to determine whether the air poses a health risk.
- Strong or persistent odors should be reported to the appropriate agency.
- Some people may experience temporary symptoms from odors.
- If you suspect a natural gas leak, leave the area immediately and contact your natural gas provider from a safe location.

If You Notice an Odor

Most environmental odors alone are not enough to determine whether the air poses a health risk.

If you notice an odor:

- If you smell natural gas (a sulfur or skunk-like smell), suspect a gas leak, or gas line damage has occurred, leave the area immediately and contact your natural gas provider from a safe location.
- If the odor is strong or persistent, report it to the appropriate agency listed below.
- Move indoors or leave the area if the odor is causing discomfort.
- Close windows and doors if outdoor odors are entering your home.
- Reduce strenuous outdoor activity while the odor is present.
- If symptoms continue or worsen, seek medical attention.
- If you have trouble breathing, chest pain, or other life-threatening symptoms, call **911**.

What do “strong” and “persistent” mean?

- A *strong odor* is easily noticeable or interferes with normal activities.
- A *persistent odor* continues or repeatedly returns over time.

Report Odors

Reporting odor concerns helps agencies receive community information and determine whether follow-up evaluation or response may be needed.

Who to Contact

Natural gas odor (strong sulfur or rotten egg smell)

- Contact your natural gas provider immediately.
- Most Los Angeles County residents: **SoCalGas – 800-427-2200**

Bad odors, smoke, dust, or other air pollution (most of Los Angeles County)

- **South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD)**
- **1-800-CUT-SMOG (1-800-288-7664)**
- [Online complaint form](#) available through South Coast AQMD

Antelope Valley

- **Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District (AVAQMD)**
- **661-723-8070**

When reporting an odor, include:

- Date and time
- Location
- Description of the odor
- Odor strength
- Any symptoms experienced
- Whether others nearby also noticed the odor

Reports from multiple locations may help agencies better understand where odors are occurring and support assessment of potential risks.

Possible Health Effects

Some people may experience temporary symptoms when exposed to strong odors, including:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Eye, nose, or throat irritation
- Cough
- Nasal congestion
- Chest tightness

- Shortness of breath
- Asthma symptoms or flare-ups

Symptoms often improve after leaving the area or when the odor dissipates.

If symptoms continue or worsen, seek medical attention. If you have trouble breathing, chest pain, or other life-threatening symptoms, call 911.

Who May Be More Sensitive?

Some people may be more sensitive to environmental odors, including:

- Children
- Older adults
- Pregnant people
- People with asthma or other respiratory conditions

People may also notice odors differently, and some individuals may experience symptoms at lower levels than others.

What Are Environmental Odors?

Environmental odors can come from many sources, including:

- Industrial facilities
- Wastewater treatment plants
- Landfills
- Agriculture
- Garbage
- Smoke
- Decomposing organic materials

Environmental odors vary in source and significance. Some odors may be detectable at levels not expected to cause health effects, while others may indicate a condition that should be investigated. Odor alone is generally not enough to determine whether the air poses a health risk. Health effects depend on what is in the air, the level (how much) and duration (how long or how often) of exposure, and individual sensitivity.