

# Sewer Gas

## Where does it come from?

*By Jerry Hemeyer, SDARWS Wastewater Technician*

Several communities have called with sewer gas problems in the system homes and businesses. This can be caused from several problem areas. First, you must realize that sewer gas is made up of hydrogen sulfide gas. This gas is produced when wastewater sits too long in an area allowing it to turn septic. When customers complain about sewer gas the first thing to do is check the manhole above and below the area of the gas. It is possible that there is a blockage starting and it can be eliminated by cleaning the sewer line. The next thing is to go into the building and physically look for the problem.

The first area of concern is dry traps in the home. It may be a floor drain, shower stall or an old sink hookup that has been neglected and the water in the trap has evaporated out of the trap. If this is the case ask the owner how often the sink, floor drain, stool or shower is used. If these traps are not used a suggestion is to put mineral oil in the trap. Mineral oil is the type that you can drink not the paint thinner. Paint thinner will give off a horrible gas if it is inserted into the trap causing an odor throughout the building.

Flush the stool in the home. It is possible that the sewer vent is plugged or the vent is not big enough. Several times people have told me that whenever the wind blows they have a sewer gas smell in the home. Ask them if when the wind blows if the water in the stool goes up and down. If this is the case, my theory is that the wind blowing over the peak of the house starts a whirl that then causes a vacuum in the pipe. To relieve the vacuum water is sucked out of the trap allowing sewer gas to enter the home. The solution to this is adding a foot of pipe to the sewer vent pipe. This is very inexpensive but may fix the problem. Always check where the sewer vents is outside of the home first. Several times we've seen a house that has been plumbed with the sewer vent in the attic. The reasoning behind this is that the attic is vented so the pipe does not need to be put out of the house. WRONG. Sewer gas is heavier than air so it will settle down into the home. This will also cause extra moisture in the attic causing mold and mildew.

### How can these problems be found?

South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems has a small smoke blower that can be used in the home or business to assist with the problem. Contact Jerry Hemeyer at 605-201-0170 to set up an appointment. ●

