

# Help! My House Stinks!

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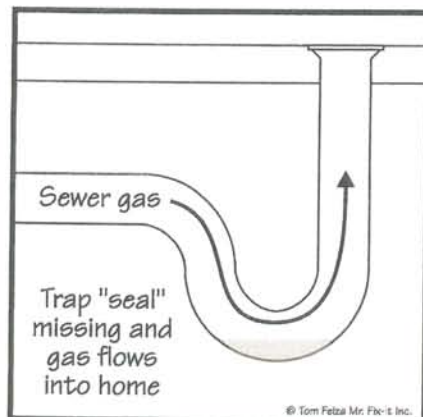
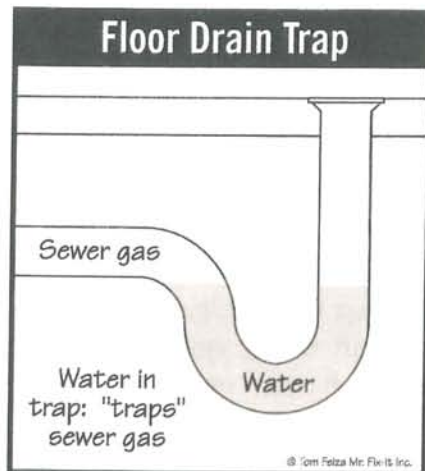
Well, it may not actually stink, but we often experience unwanted odors in our homes. Their source can be difficult to locate. Let's explore the "secret solution" to several common odors.

## Sewer Smell in Home

When you detect a sewer smell in your home, there may be a dry trap in the drainage system. Often the smell comes from a seldom-used floor drain in the basement.

All drains to a sewer system have a P-shaped trap which is usually filled with water. The trap provides a seal to keep out sewer gas. If your basement floor drain is rarely used, water evaporates from the trap over time. Eventually the seal is eliminated, allowing sewer gas (and odor) into your house. The solution is easy: pour water into the drain.

If the trap is okay and the smell is noticeable mainly around a sink, try flushing a strong cleaner and bleach down



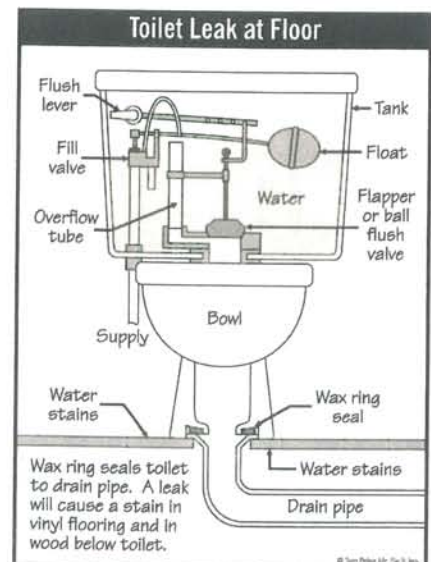
the sink's overflow—the small hole(s) inside the bowl near the rim. This area may have an odor because when the sink fills to near overflowing, water is routed through an inner chamber to the drain. Debris can collect inside the inner chamber, causing odor.

If neither of these measures solves the problem, there may be a small leak in one of the vent lines of the plumbing system, or a small leak around the base of a toilet or other fixture. You may need the help of a plumber. Check for loose fittings, corrosion, or holes in vent piping. Also, check the top side of horizontal drain pipes. If the top is rusted, the pipe may never leak liquid, but it will leak sewer gas. Drain lines made of copper, steel or cast iron may all exhibit this problem.

## Sewer Smell from Toilet

When urine and sewer smells persist near a toilet despite careful cleaning, identify the source of the smell. Is it from the hot water? Is it from the floor around the toilet? Is it from the sink or tub?

Smells from the hot water may be caused by bacteria in the



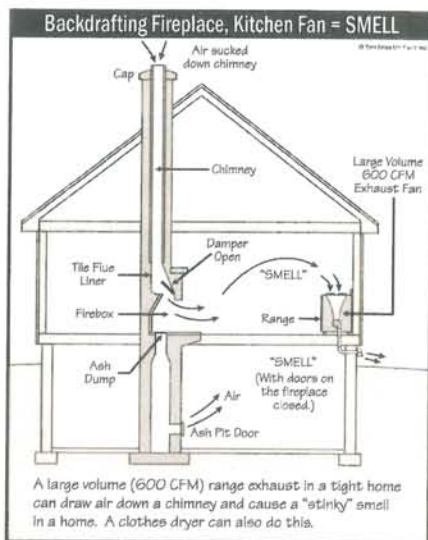
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water heater and the anode rod. Smells from the floor area may indicate that the toilet is leaking, wetting the subfloor. Traps in sinks and tubs also can give off odors from time to time. Once you know the source, you can track down a solution.

If the smell comes from the area around the toilet, there may be an air leak at the wax ring of the toilet or in the vent pipe. Check to see if the toilet is tightly sealed to the floor. Grab the bowl of the toilet and try to slide it from side to side. It should resist a few pounds of pressure. If the toilet rocks from side to side, the wax ring has failed.

To replace the wax ring, hire a professional plumber. It's necessary to check the spacing between the pipe flange and the toilet base, and it is difficult to properly secure a toilet in place.

## Smoke Smells from the Fireplace—Without a Fire



A smoky smell coming from a fireplace that's not in use is probably caused by negative pressure that draws air down the chimney, past the stinky ashes and into your home.

First, check that the damper is in good condition and is tightly closed. If there are fireplace glass doors, close them. Close any outside air supply to the fireplace.

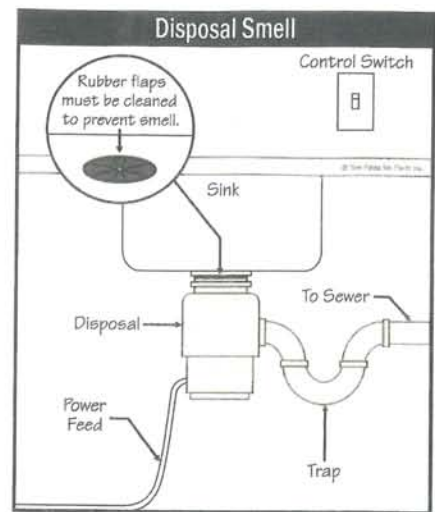
Now think about what may be causing the pressure that draws air down the chimney. Clothes dryers and kitchen exhaust fans are notorious for this. Bathroom fans and other ventilation fans also remove air. A whole-house ventilation fan is another likely culprit. A naturally drafted gas appliance like a water heater or furnace also removes air from your home and sends it up a different chimney along with combustion gas. Some high-efficiency furnaces and water heaters have a draft fan that draws air.

Analyze this problem carefully, because the negative pressure could also cause a gas furnace or water heater to backdraft, sending combustion gas into your home. Backdrafting is a serious safety concern. You may need to have a heating contractor or an engineer analyze the problem.

The solution may also be simple: open a window slightly when running the clothes dryer or kitchen exhaust fan to provide another air source so air won't be drawn down the fireplace chimney.

## Smelly Kitchen Sink

Food deposits sitting in a kitchen sink trap or disposal may develop a foul smell. You can clean the trap by pouring a gallon or two of boiling water down the drain and then following with about a half-gallon of vinegar. Allow the vinegar to sit in the trap overnight, and then



flush with water.

If you like the feel and excitement of a little foaming action, add baking soda to the trap before you add the vinegar. It will foam and froth, and some claim this improves the cleaning process.

To clean the disposal: run cold water down the drain, turn on the disposal, and run several handfuls of ice cubes down the disposal. The hard chunks of ice will help dislodge food particles. Follow with a lemon rind or orange rind to help remove deposits and create a clean aroma.

You should also clean the rubber flaps at the top of the disposal. The underside of these flaps can be coated with food, another source of a foul smell. Scrub the flaps with a stiff bristle brush and a strong detergent. Flush well after cleaning.

*Written by Tom Feiza—Mr. Fix-It. See Tom's book How to Operate Your Home (ISBN 09747591-0) for great information on "operating" a home. The book is available at Amazon.com or through Tom at www.mister-fix-it.com or 262-786-7878.*