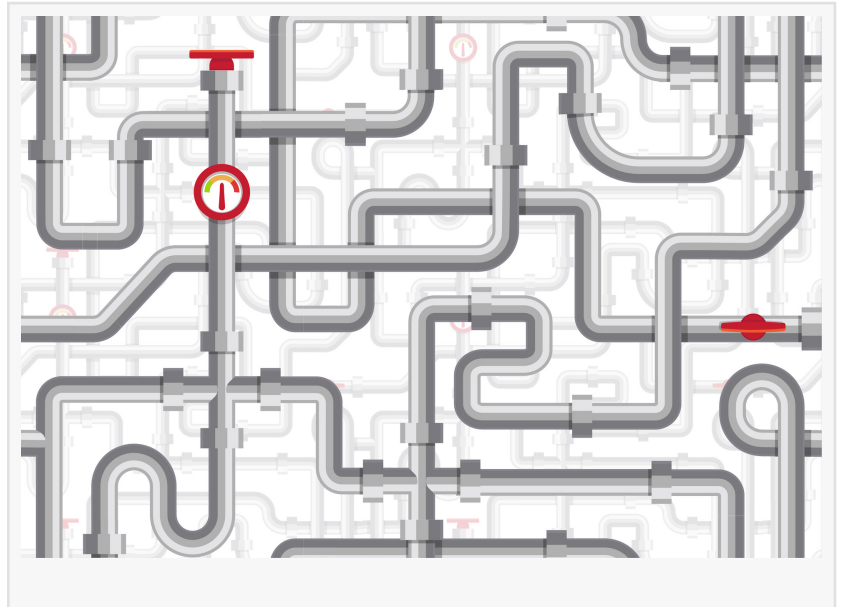


Identifying Common Plumbing Odors and Their Underlying Causes, Says New Orleans Plumbing Professional

SLIDELL, LA, UNITED STATES, May 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Unpleasant odors emanating from household plumbing often indicate underlying issues that require attention beyond routine cleaning. From sulfuric smells to sewer gas, identifying the source of the odor is key to preventing further complications such as health risks, pipe corrosion, or system failure.

[Stephen Jordan](#), owner of [SMI Plumbing](#) in Slidell, Louisiana, explains that recurring plumbing odors often originate from ventilation problems, bacterial growth, or faulty seals that allow gases to escape into living spaces.



“Odors are not just nuisances—they are warnings,” said Jordan. “Each type of smell corresponds to a different problem, and recognizing those differences is the first step in correcting them.”

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The most recognizable odor is a rotten egg smell, typically caused by hydrogen sulfide gas. This odor is often associated with sulfur bacteria that grow in plumbing systems, especially in warm, stagnant water environments such as water heaters or unused drains. These bacteria feed on organic matter and produce gas as a byproduct. In

many cases, the odor can be traced to the drain itself rather than the water supply.

Another frequent source of unpleasant plumbing odors is sewer gas. This smell is often described as musty, earthy, or similar to decaying organic material. Sewer gas consists of methane, ammonia, and other byproducts of waste decomposition. While low-level exposure

may only be irritating, high concentrations can pose serious health hazards. Sewer gas typically enters homes through dry drain traps, cracked pipes, or faulty vent systems. Infrequently used sinks, tubs, or floor drains may allow water in the trap to evaporate, eliminating the barrier that normally blocks gases from rising.

Moldy or damp odors in bathrooms or under sinks often result from hidden leaks. When moisture accumulates behind walls or in cabinets, it creates the perfect environment for mold and mildew. Over time, the buildup releases a musty smell and may cause damage to structural elements. Plumbing connections under sinks, around toilets, or behind appliances are common sources. The presence of soft wood, discoloration, or visible mold growth often accompanies this type of odor.

A sharp, chemical smell near drains or basins may be linked to improperly vented drain lines or residue from chemical cleaners reacting with organic material in the pipes. In older homes, drain vents may not meet modern code, leading to pressure imbalances and incomplete drainage. These imbalances allow odors to escape through fixture drains instead of being carried away through the vent system.

Grease traps in kitchens and commercial establishments are also frequent contributors to plumbing odors. When grease, oils, and food waste accumulate in traps or pipes, anaerobic bacteria begin breaking them down. The resulting gases are particularly pungent and can permeate entire rooms. Regular maintenance of grease traps and drain lines is required to prevent buildup and eliminate odor sources.

In laundry rooms, an intermittent sewage-like odor may originate from the washing machine drain. Lint, soap residue, and organic debris can collect in the standpipe, allowing bacteria to grow and release foul smells during drainage cycles. In these cases, cleaning the standpipe or installing a vented trap can address the issue.

Water softeners and filtration systems occasionally produce metallic or sulfur-like odors, especially when filters are overdue for replacement or bacterial contamination occurs in the system. Regular inspection and filter changes help eliminate these smells and maintain water quality.

In buildings with shared plumbing systems, such as apartments or multi-family homes, odors may migrate between units through improperly sealed vent systems, shared drain lines, or



backflow events. Diagnosing the source in these environments requires a combination of pressure testing, camera inspections, and odor tracing methods.

Pinpointing the source of plumbing odors requires a methodical approach. The first step often involves identifying whether the smell originates from a single fixture, a specific room, or is present throughout the building. The next step is to determine whether the odor is constant or intermittent. This information helps narrow down whether the issue is related to traps, drainage, ventilation, or contamination.

Smoke testing and camera inspections are commonly used to locate damaged or disconnected plumbing components hidden behind walls or under floors. These tools help identify open joints, cracked lines, or incorrectly installed fixtures that may be allowing gases to escape.

Preventative measures include regularly running water in seldom-used drains to maintain trap seals, avoiding overuse of chemical cleaners that disrupt microbial balance in pipes, and scheduling routine inspections for hidden leaks or venting issues. Grease, hygiene products, and other solids should never be disposed of in sinks or toilets, as they contribute to buildup and bacterial growth.

Ignoring plumbing odors often leads to more serious problems, including mold growth, water damage, or hazardous gas accumulation. Proactive maintenance, timely diagnosis, and appropriate repairs protect both property and health.

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