

What to Do if You Smell Gas

You know a gas leak can cause serious damage; you have likely seen news stories about gas explosions in buildings. This type of risk can be reduced by proper maintenance — and by simply following a great detection device — your nose.

Suppose you catch a whiff of sulfur while in the furnace room, or smell rotten eggs in the basement. Those odors are cause for concern. Natural gas is odorless in its pure form. What gives it odor is a substance called mercaptan, which is added to it so that you can smell gas when you have a leak. Mercaptan has been described as smelling like garbage, sulfur, or rotten or boiled eggs. But no matter what you think it smells like, smelling it could save your life.

If you smell gas inside your property, you should immediately:

- Open doors and windows to ventilate the area
- Evacuate the premises
- Contact your gas company from outside of the property — either call from a neighboring building or walk well away from the affected property before you use your mobile phone

If you smell gas, DO NOT:

- Light a match or use a lighter anywhere near the property
- Turn on lights or appliances, especially the stove
- Use electronics (including your cell phone)
- Start any motors

If you inform the gas company that you smell gas, they will send a representative to your location immediately. Often, the representative will be able to pinpoint the problem. Sometimes, it is as simple as a pilot light going out — but it could be as dangerous as a gas leak in a pipe or a serious problem with your furnace.

In the event of a leak or other dangerous problem, the gas company will turn off your gas supply. Then, once a plumber or HVAC technician has repaired the problem, the gas company will return to test the repair and turn the gas back on again. Having your furnace maintained on an annual basis may help to reduce this risk.

Carbon monoxide is odorless

There is another kind of potentially deadly gas leak you could have inside your building: carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is produced when fuel does not burn completely. Poor ventilation of a furnace or boiler could be the source of a carbon monoxide leak. Because this gas is odorless, you need a carbon monoxide alarm to detect it and alert you of its presence. Be sure to annually check the batteries in your carbon monoxide alarm.