

# What is that odor?

*Odor complaints are among the most common complaints received on campus.*

If an odor is apparent in many rooms (i.e., the entire floor or wing of a building), it's likely the odor is being distributed by the supply air system itself. Occasionally there is an odor source near the air intakes for the building. In these circumstances odors may be from vehicle exhaust, work performed on/near air intakes, and work performed inside the air handler rooms.

The vast majority of odor complaints affect only a single room or suite. This usually means the odor source is somewhere in/near the room with the smell. It often seems the smell is coming from the vent. This is because the air moving from the vent pulls room air along with it, giving the impression that the supply air is the cause.

**Common odor sources may include:**

## Dry Drain Trap(s)

This is a common odor source. The smell comes and goes and may, at times, be very strong. It is often a rotten egg smell, but is sometimes described as a chemical odor. Sink and floor drains are equipped with a trap, usually in the form of a U, P, or S-shaped pipe. Liquid is trapped in the bend and forms a seal, preventing sewer gases from escaping out of the drain into your work area. In general, campus rooms are maintained at a negative pressure. Thus, if the trap is dry, any odor in the sewer can be pulled into the room. Dry traps are often found in cup sinks (those little sinks in the back of lab benches & hoods), floor drains, sinks covered by equipment, and open condensate drains.

## What to do?

- Run water in all sinks and drains, at least once each semester, or more often if necessary.
- For infrequently used drains, pour in a small amount of **mineral oil** to prevent the water from evaporating.
- If this is unsuccessful, call the TAMU Physical Plant at 845-4311 for assistance.
- If Physical Plant determines it necessary, special trap oil may be used.
- Don't forget to search out ALL the drains in your location, including floor drains, cup sinks, sinks, and drain openings in your facilities.

## Natural Gas Leaks

Smells like Natural Gas? **What to do?** Call the TAMU Emergency Services Operator at 9-911 from a campus phone (or 911 on a cell phone); report your exact location.

## Forgotten or Lost Food

Perishables occasionally fall behind furniture, or food can be placed in drawers and forgotten. These smells tend to be localized to a room and remain fairly constant over the course of a day (as opposed to dry traps which can vary greatly in intensity over short periods of time). **What to do?** Search the affected area; look in drawers, behind furniture. Remove and dispose of the offending item(s).

## Dead Animals

This smell is fairly obvious. **What to do?** Call the TAMU Physical Plant Operator at 845-4311; report your exact location, and request Pest Control Services.

## Fluorescent Light Ballast

A smell of burning plastic confined to a single area may be a failing light ballast. Check to make sure there is nothing else burning (computer monitors, as well as other equipment, may fail and smoke). **What to do?** Turn off power to any equipment that is failing. Call the TAMU Physical Plant at 845-4311 for ballast evaluation and replacement.

## Smoke Odors

Smoking is not allowed inside buildings, near exit doors or near building air intakes. (Our most frequent smoke odor complaint is from microwave popcorn.)

## What to do?

- Do not smoke within 50 feet of an exit/entry door.
- Do not smoke within 150 feet of the building's air intake.
- If you do not know where the air intakes are, ask your Building Proctor.
- Post instructions for safe microwave oven use.