

Responding to gas odors from an unknown source



Police and fire departments frequently receive reports of a natural gas odor from an unknown source. The consequences of a natural gas leak can be grave, so fully investigate any report of a gas odor as a potentially dangerous natural gas leak.

Always use CGIs

Never rely on your nose alone to determine whether a gas leak exists. Though added Mercaptan gives natural gas its characteristic rotten-egg smell, you may not be able to smell it if:

- You have been exposed to it for too long.
- It is masked by other odors.
- It is stripped from the gas by chemical or physical processes.

In addition, several substances may smell like Mercaptan, including sewer gas, decomposing proteins or chemicals. You must use combustible gas indicators (CGI) to determine whether dangerous levels of natural gas are present.

Response tactics

Upon receiving a report of a gas leak, your dispatcher should advise callers to evacuate the immediate area but remain on scene to provide the arriving fire officer with specific information. The dispatcher should initiate a public safety response to isolate and investigate the incident and then notify National Grid or the local natural gas utility and request an immediate response. In addition, the dispatcher should notify other municipal and public safety agencies, including the police department and possibly the Department of Public Works (DPW).



Police and fire personnel should approach the incident scene cautiously. Personnel in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) should initiate air monitoring and determine an appropriate exclusion zone. Stage vehicles upwind, away from the hazard area. If a leak is confirmed, a staging distance of 330 feet is recommended.

Upon arrival, interview the reporting parties to obtain as much information as possible. Even if reports of gas odors recur in a specific area, never assume that the same situation exists because that's what happened last time.

Law enforcement personnel should evacuate the immediate area and reroute traffic away from your operating area to minimize ignition sources and create an appropriate exclusion zone.

Working with National Grid

National Grid personnel recognize that an emergency incident is under the control of the Incident Commander (IC). We will:

- Inform the IC of our arrival and coordinate actions to resolve the incident.
- Provide guidance about the gas distribution system and mobilize resources to control the leak.
- Help to render the area safe.
- Restore service once damage has been repaired.

For more safety information and training, visit firstresponder.ngridsafety.com.
To report emergencies, call 911 and National Grid immediately.