



Workplace odors can impact a building's indoor air quality (IAQ) and cause distress and discomfort among building occupants. These odors usually can be traced back to a few common sources and are discussed below along with effective ways to mitigate or prevent recurrence.

DRY SINK AND FLOOR DRAIN P-TRAPS

The P-trap is a plumbing device that is attached to a sink or floor drain and prevents odorous plumbing and sewer gases from passing into the building space. A dried P-trap is the most common odor source in campus buildings. Odors are often characterized as “rotten eggs” or sewage. Odors are intermittent and may be very strong at times.



In a laboratory, negative air pressure ventilation is more likely to pull up odors from a drain than an office (which has positive pressure ventilation). Dry traps could occur in “cup sinks” (small sinks in the middle of lab benches), floor drains, and sinks covered by equipment or no longer used. **Prevent or eliminate dry trap odors by running water in all sinks with a ½-gallon of water once a month.**



OFFICE REMODELING

Primer, paint, and new furnishings (e.g., carpet, laminate flooring) can emanate odors locally and be distributed through the ventilation system. Campus projects use low-odor materials in most cases, but trace odors like a “new car smell” may still be detected by building occupants after the work is completed, and may take some time to dissipate. **Maximize air circulation with continuous air circulation until the odors are satisfactory.**



PLUG-IN SCENTED OIL AIR FRESHENERS

These devices are discouraged in the work environment because they may contain chemicals that may cause eye and respiratory irritation.

SPOILED FOOD

Look for spoiled food in offices and refrigerators, and discard promptly. Check refrigerators periodically and keep clean.

LABORATORY CHEMICALS

Laboratories are designed to maintain a negative pressure between the laboratory and adjacent non-laboratory spaces.

What I need to do

- Review this fact sheet for potential IAQ sources and simple ways to remedy them.
- Fill sinks and floor drains with water regularly.
- Notify FPM Customer Resource Center at (213) 740-6833 to report a clogged drain.
- Notify my supervisor of any persistent odors.
- Contact EH&S at (323) 442-2200 to report any indoor air quality (IAQ) issues.

This pressure differential prevents uncontrolled, odoriferous vapors from leaving the laboratory and migrating to the surrounding areas such as hallways. **To minimize malodors, follow best laboratory work practices and keep the laboratory door closed.**



ODORS ENTERING THE BUILDING

On occasion, diesel exhaust from stationary generators, delivery trucks, or construction equipment may penetrate buildings. Smoke from on-campus barbeques may also enter buildings. These are normally short-lived events. **Close exterior doors and windows. Ask drivers parked near your building's fresh air intake to turn off their engines. Talk to your building manager if the problem persists.**



SMOKING

As of January 1, 2017, smoking is prohibited in all indoor and outdoor facilities on university-owned and leased properties with no exception, including vehicles parked on those properties. However, renegade smoke from passersby may migrate into first floor areas through open portals (e.g., doors, windows, and air intakes).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- P-trap and Sewer Gas Smell video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we18XMJmnOM>
- USC Smoke-Free Policy: <https://policy.usc.edu/smoke-free/>

