

Flat Rock Emergency Response Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This document contains answers to questions about the Flat Rock gas leak posed by residents over the last week. Answers to specific questions raised during the town hall meeting held on Wednesday, September 8th, that are not covered by this FAQ will be addressed in an upcoming communications, including Health-Related FAQ and future town hall conversations.

Communications

How will residents be provided ongoing information about the gas leak incident?

We are committed to improving communication with residents. Daily updates will be posted on the City of Flat Rock's website (www.flatrockmi.org) and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/flatrockmi/). Updates will also be posted on the EPA website at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=15330.

Will there be a link with testing data for residents to access?

MDHHS will have summative testing results. A link will be shared at www.flatrockmi.org. EPA has an online viewer of data that can be publicly shared at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=15330.

Most Frequently Asked Questions

I think I smell gas (benzene) in my home, what do I do?

Strike teams are on standby to screen odor complaints. Please call 734-782-2455, ext. 6 and our team will investigate your odor complaint.

What should I do to remain safe if I live in Zone 1?

It's been recommended as a precautionary measure that Zone 1 residents evacuate their homes and screening confirms it is safe to return. Teams are working to make this happen as fast as possible. Call 734- 782-2455, ext.6, to learn about resources available to you.

What should I do to remain safe if I live in Zone 2?

If Zone 2 residents are concerned about potential exposure to chemicals in their home from this release, they may want to evacuate their homes until further information is available. Call 734-782-2455, ext.6 to learn about resources available to you.

If we are evacuated from our homes, how can we let the EPA in for testing?

Individuals that have requested testing for their home will be contacted to schedule an appointment to get their home tested. If you have any questions or haven't heard from someone about scheduling, please call 734-782-2455, ext. 6 for assistance.

Who do I call if I have questions about evacuation and/or hotel and food accommodations?

If you have questions about evacuation or other non-odor concerns, please call 734- 782-2455, ext.6.

If I evacuate, how long should I pack for?

Now that the release has been stopped and work has been done to flush the sewer system, data has shown that levels of the total volatile organic compounds (VOCS) are decreasing in the sewer system and are either not detectable or at background levels. Preliminary screening began as soon as the response was initiated. EPA began screening with the TAGA on Wednesday, September 8.

We acknowledge that uncertainty about the timeline for residents to return home is frustrating. We are working hard to provide more specific answers when we have enough data to do so. Screening of homes is just beginning; therefore, we do not have an estimated timeline yet for when residents can return home. However, a plan for getting people back into their homes is based on data and information about status of the gasoline release, success of flushing of sanitary line, and collection and analysis of screening data. As sewer testing and home screening progresses, more specifics about timing will emerge and residents will receive regular updates.

Where can I evacuate to with my pets?

Some of the hotels that are receiving evacuated residents are pet friendly. When you're calling for relocation services, let the operator know that you need this service. It is also understood that several of the local pet adoption agencies are offering temporary fostering services. Residents can reach out them directly if they need additional assistance. Please call 734-782-2455, ext.6 to learn about resources available to you.

What risks would I face if I choose to stay home and not evacuate?

The main health impact of long-term exposure to benzene is on the blood. It can cause low blood cell counts, a weakened immune system, and blood cancer.

Short-term health effects include headaches, rapid heart rate, or dizziness. Having these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have been exposed to benzene, but if you are having these symptoms and have concerns then you should seek evaluation from a medical provider.

It is important to note that benzene leaves the blood stream very quickly after someone has been exposed, so tests for benzene cannot tell you if you have been exposed, for how long, or what the potential health impacts of that exposure may be.

How can I get my home tested?

Testing of your home may not be required, because screening of the area's sewers that have been flushed to remove the gasoline appears to be making substantial progress. However, if you have concerns about the air in your home, please call 734-782-2455, ext. 6 to be placed on a list that will be evaluated for the need for screening. We will contact you to schedule an appointment if needed.

We are also maintaining a team to respond in your home to odor complaints.

How do we know that the areas outside of Zone 1 and 2 are not impacted?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and local fire department, with assistance from hazmat teams, screened sewers following the path the contamination would follow to get to the wastewater treatment plant. They also took into consideration the way the vapors were moving – which was sometimes against the current of the sewage flow. The EPA has continued to screen locations throughout Flat Rock to ensure the contamination has not spread beyond what was known and the health departments will identify any changing public health risks.

How do we know the area between Zone 1 and 2 is safe and not affected by the spill?

Per city records and data collected by the EPA and local fire department, with assistance from hazmat teams, the neighborhoods between Zone 1 and Zone 2 are distantly connected to the affected sanitary sewer lines. Screening in that area has not detected the chemicals of concern above the established health action levels. Sewers have been cleared of all but trace vapors for many days, significantly reducing any risk of airborne vapor transmission. There is no indication of an outdoor air concern or that toxins from Zones 1 and 2 could carry over into other areas.

What impact will this leak have on local schools?

School properties in Flat Rock have been screened. The following schools have been deemed safe and are operating normally: John Barnes Elementary School, Ethel Bobcean Elementary School, Thomas Simpson Middle School, and Flat Rock Community High School. Information about the test results conducted at schools can be found at https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=15330. Follow-up screening at the schools has been occurring to verify they remain safe.

River Heights Academy Olmstead location initially had results above acceptable screening levels. The school reported that through a partnership with Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD), they temporarily moved their Kinder - 8th grade classes to the WCCCD Downriver Campus and began classes on Tuesday.

Is the drinking water contaminated with gasoline?

No. The drinking water pipes are a closed system and there is no reason to believe it has been affected. Drinking water plant operators have reported nothing unusual. Precautionary test results are pending, and the results will be announced as soon as they are available.

Can rain cause the contamination to spread?

The sanitary sewer is a closed system and should not be affected by rainwater. Ford has isolated and continues to actively monitor the sanitary sewer line that was impacted by the gasoline release to prevent any potential for additional migration, including any impact from a rain event.

If all the manholes are open for venting, will areas outside of the identified zones become impacted?

The EPA is measuring outside air in between screenings of the sewer system, and all outdoor air readings have come back clear and are expected to remain so. Air quality screenings will continue until all venting is complete.

Is this spill isolated to the city of Flat Rock?

There are no indications that areas outside of the City of Flat Rock have been impacted.

My house is on the border of a zone, is my water, soil, and air safe?

Out of an abundance of caution, environmental testing will continue to ensure air, water, and soil remain safe in Flat Rock. **Water:** The drinking water pipes are a closed system and there is no reason to believe it has been affected. Drinking water plant operators have reported nothing unusual. Precautionary test results are pending. City water is routinely tested by the municipality, and they will notify residents if there are concerns. **Surface Water:** EPA has sampled two surface water streams and there was no detection of gasoline components. **Soil:** Although the investigation is ongoing, the spill occurred on the property of the Ford Assembly Plant. While it's likely the soil at the plant may be affected by the spill, currently there are no reports of the contamination moving off site via any pathway except the sanitary sewer lines. **Air:** Vapors are not being found in the outside air during routine screening.

When did the gasoline leak start?

The first report of contaminants in the sewer came in on Tuesday, Aug. 31. The leak was discovered by Ford on Wednesday, Sept. 1. How long it may have been leaking is unknown, and part of the ongoing investigation.

How does benzene get into my home?

Benzene vapors from this release can get into your home through your sump pump if it wasn't hooked up to the sewer correctly. They can also enter through dry drain traps. Ensure your traps have water in them.

How can benzene affect my health?

The main health impact of long-term exposure to benzene is on the blood. It can cause low blood cell counts, a weakened immune system, and blood cancer.

Short term health effects include headaches, rapid heart rate, or dizziness. Having these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have been exposed to benzene, but if you are having these symptoms and have concerns then you should seek evaluation from a medical provider.

It is important to note that benzene leaves the blood stream very quickly after someone has been exposed, so tests for benzene cannot tell you if you have been exposed, for how long, or what the potential health impacts of that exposure may be.

Resources for Residents

Will there be payment assistance for any medical bills caused from exposure?

Ford and the City of Flat Rock are in the process of creating the Flat Rock Community Fund to assess with requests from residents for reimbursement. More information is forthcoming.

Is financial assistance available for evacuation?

Residents can call 734-782-2455, ext.6 to arrange assistance and support for evacuation including hotel vouchers.

Can I get a hotel voucher if I do not feel safe but do not live in Zone 1 or 2.

No. The evacuation program is only for residents in affected areas.

Impacted Zones

Should residents within Zone 2 evacuate?

If Zone 2 residents are concerned about potential exposure to chemicals in their home, they may choose to evacuate their homes until further information is available. Call 734-782-2455, ext.6 to learn about resources available to you.

Why are the two identified zones being treated differently?

The contaminated sanitary sewer line runs through Zone 1 and there is data showing hazardous benzene levels in the sewer lines and some homes. The location of Zone 2 in relation to the contaminate flow would indicate reduced risk, however, we are unable to state there is no risk. More data is being collected for Zone 2 and updated guidance will be issued as that data is analyzed.

Do you expect new zones to be identified or for current zones to grow larger?

Per our understanding, the source of the gasoline has been stopped and levels overall in the sanitary sewer system are decreasing, so we do not expect new zones to be identified nor do we expect the current zones to grow larger. However, the health agencies will continue to screen the area and the data will be reviewed regularly to make sure others aren't at risk.

Are other areas of the city being proactively tested?

The entire sanitary sewer system that either had gasoline components or is connected to a sewer that had gasoline components in it has been screened by EPA and the local fire department, with assistance from hazmat teams.

Leak Status

How did gasoline end up in the sanitary sewers?

Ford Motor Company has stated that the Flat Rock Assembly Plant identified a gasoline leak on Wednesday, September 1, 2021, that is the source of contamination in Flat Rock. From the release site, it entered into the sanitary sewer and migrated into the city sewer system. We are still investigating to understand the exact path into the plant's sanitary sewers.

What is Ford doing to prevent a leak from occurring again?

First, Ford repaired the leaking pipe and removed the gasoline from the tank so no more gasoline can escape. In addition, Ford is:

- Decommissioning all underground gasoline piping and replacing with aboveground piping. This work is being reviewed and approved with Michigan's Licensing and Regulatory Affairs – Underground Storage Tank Division (LARA), and will be completed before restarting any fuel-filling operations at the Plant.
- Evaluating whether any additional changes in its system and operations are needed to remove the potential for this leak path from occurring, again.

Additionally, Michigan EGLE is overseeing and advising Ford on the investigation and cleanup activities.

Have you found the source of the spill and has the leak been stopped?

Yes. The source of the spill was traced back to the Ford Flat Rock Assembly Plant. Ford stopped the leak immediately when it was discovered on Sept. 1.

When will the leak be resolved?

The leak at the Flat Rock Assembly Plant has been resolved and we are confirming that there are no identified safety risks so that people can return to their homes. Ford stopped the leak and stopped the flow from its plant into the sewer lines. The sections of the sewer system at the site where gasoline may have been present have been thoroughly cleaned. Affected sections of the city sewer system have been thoroughly flushed over the course of many days. The United Incident Command team is now testing sewer lines and homes to confirm that there are no identified safety risks.

What actions has Ford taken to address the leak?

Ford began implementing the initial response actions immediately upon discovery of the release from a gasoline fuel pipe connected to Tank 1. Initial actions included:

- Shut down gasoline UST system and emptied Tank 1
- Inspected subsurface structures, utilities and indoor air of the plant for presence of gasoline or gasoline vapors
- Removed gasoline that had collected in the gasoline piping vault/transition sump where the release was discovered
- Performed camera/video inspections of select sections of the sanitary sewers on-site
- Completed soil borings in and immediately adjacent to the fill material in the immediate vicinity of where the release was discovered and along the fuel piping trench
- Installed a temporary well in the fill material where gasoline-free product was encountered

Additionally, the sanitary sewer in the area adjacent to the gasoline release remains plugged to prevent any potential off-site migration of gasoline or gasoline vapors via the sanitary sewer until necessary onsite responses are complete. Regular VOC monitoring is being performed throughout the plant. Ford continues to meet daily with the United Incident Command and is providing progress reports every day. Ford will continue to work together with the respective agencies to identify additional corrective actions.

Contamination/Future Risk

Will the benzene levels fluctuate over time in our homes?

Now that the release has been stopped and work has been done to flush the sewer system, data has shown that levels of the total VOCs are decreasing in the sewer systems. The EPA has mobilized in special equipment to increasing their capacity to screen the sewer lines and homes beginning on Tuesday, September 8 . Once the gasoline is cleared out of the sewer system, there should be no further exposure risk to benzene from that source. There are many everyday home hazards that can contribute benzene to your home's air, though. Besides being found in gasoline, benzene is used as a solvent for fats, waxes, resins, oils, inks, paints, plastics, and rubber and can be found in tobacco smoke.

Is there a risk of soil contamination?

Although the investigation is ongoing, there are no reports of the contamination moving from the Flat Rock Assembly Plant via any pathway except the sewer lines. Ford has developed an initial investigation plan, which has been provided to both the U.S. EPA and Michigan EGLE, as well as an initial Evacuation Plan to expeditiously identify and remove any impacted soil/fill from the release area. This work is actively underway and daily progress reports are being provided.

Will soil sampling occur?

Per the above, this work is already underway at the Flat Rock Assembly Plant. Ford is taking soil samples and provides daily updates on the results. If the results show the gasoline leak has moved into the soil beyond Ford's plant, we will sample soil where there is an indication of contamination.

Flushing of Sanitary Sewer System

Is there a risk of gasoline related vapor levels increasing while the sewer system is flushed?

A flushing process has been instituted to flush vapors from the sanitary sewer system. The sewer system that had product in it has been cleaned. After the cleaning and flushing, any vapors that remain in the sanitary sewer system were already present. The sanitary sewers will continue to be monitored throughout the flushing process.

Will the flushing of the sanitary systems cause any new hazards that residents need to be concerned about?

The flushing is not expected to cause any additional problems in the sanitary sewer system, however, the high volume of water moving through the pipes when flushing occurs may result in pieces of metal or other pipes coatings to break off within the drinking water pipes. To minimize any debris or small particles that may enter the water system, we recommend that you clean your [aerators \(the screens located at the end of some faucet fixtures\)](#) to and run your water for a few minutes before replacing your aerator when you return to your home. This will help to clear out any debris that may be flowing through the pipes.

Where can I find a map of affected areas and sewer systems?

https://response.epa.gov/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=15330.

Information on Benzene

What is benzene?

Benzene is a flammable and colorless liquid with a sweet odor. It is used to make other chemicals. It is one of the most commonly made chemicals in the United States. It is found in crude oil, gasoline, tobacco smoke, and a variety of other products. It floats on water and evaporates into the air very easily; however, it is heavier than air, so it could potentially stay in low-lying parts of homes and basements.

How do I know if my home is being affected by benzene?

While benzene can be smelled at very high levels, it can harm health at levels below what can be smelled. With limited resources not all homes can be tested immediately. It is recommended you evacuate until further information is available. If you have concerns about your health, MDHHS recommends that you evacuate until further information is available. If you have questions about this recommendation, please contact MDHHS at 800-648-6942.

Should I be tested for benzene or other VOCs?

Benzene quickly leaves your body once exposure is stopped. Although the levels were high in some locations, the time of exposure was relatively short. A test of your blood, breath, or urine will not be able to tell you how much benzene you were exposed to. Please talk to your health care provider to discuss any health concerns.

What are the other risks of having benzene or other VOCs in the air?

Benzene and other chemicals found in gasoline are highly flammable and can explode if levels are high enough. Porous materials in the home could retain and off-gas chemicals for some time after the event if levels are high enough in the home. Foods in sealed containers or stored in the refrigerator are unlikely to be impacted by these vapors.

How long have I been exposed to benzene?

Ford first became aware of the leak on Wednesday, September 1; however, odor complaints began on August 31. It is unknown how long the tank was leaking prior to the odor complaints beginning. That is part of the ongoing investigation.

Can benzene attach to sanitary sewer pipes?

We are not aware of any concern (or evidence) that benzene or other components of gasoline will bind with piping or that it is a known route of exposure to humans. The pipes in Flat Rocks sanitary sewer system have been thoroughly and continually flushed with fresh water over the course of many days to remove any residual chemicals.

What are the long-term health effects if exposed to benzene?

The main health impact of long-term exposure to benzene is on the blood. It can cause low blood cell counts, a weakened immune system, and blood cancer.

Short-term health effects include headaches, rapid heart rate, or dizziness. Having these symptoms does not necessarily mean you have been exposed to benzene, but if you are having these symptoms and have concerns then you should seek evaluation from a medical provider.

It is important to note that benzene leaves the blood stream very quickly after someone has been exposed, so tests for benzene cannot tell you if you have been exposed, for how long, or what the potential health impacts of that exposure may be.

How quickly does benzene leave the body?

When benzene is inhaled and enters the body, about half of the benzene leaves the body in 1-2 days by being exhaled by the lungs. The other half is changed into different molecules, called metabolites, that leave the body in the urine within 1-2 days." (Adapted from Institute of Medicine. 1995. *Environmental Medicine: Integrating a Missing Element into Medical Education*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/4795>.)

Can benzene negatively impact my health if I cannot smell it?

Benzene can harm health at levels below what can be smelled. This is why the EPA is screening homes with special equipment to ensure that your health is protected.

Will blood testing be available to residents?

Benzene quickly leaves your body once exposure is stopped. Although the levels were high in some locations, the time of exposure was relatively short. A test of your blood, breath, or urine will not be able to tell you how much benzene you were exposed to. Please talk to your health care provider to discuss any health concerns.

Should I continue to breastfeed my child?

If you are breastfeeding, please contact your health care provider right away to discuss your exposure risks and next steps. If you have been exposed to benzene and other VOCs in gasoline, they may be in your breast milk.

If you have any additional questions, please email cityofflatrock@gmail.com