

Is That Gas I Smell?

By Mark Wilkins,
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It was a beautiful December morning when a friend's mom decided to take care of some overdue flower-bed maintenance around her house. While pulling weeds beside her gas meter, she smelled natural gas and immediately called her son, Jeff, an air-conditioning-equipment mechanic and a master gasfitter, asking, "What should I do?"

Jeff told her to call and ask the gas company to evaluate the meter. The company responded quickly, only to find no leaks in the meter or the piping leading to it. Everything was working OK. The company reps, however, turned off the gas and locked the meter, then explained to Jeff's mom that she had to get a certified contractor to inspect and repair the leak.

My friend's mom called him back and repeated what the gas-company reps had said. She also asked if he could stop by and check the leak for her. She uses gas to heat her home, so he went over right away.

A pressure check failed, so Jeff began a careful inspection of all the gas piping. Everything from the meter to where the piping ran through a PVC sleeve in the cinderblock foundation looked OK. Because his mom's heating unit was located under her house, he crawled under there and inspected the piping from the cinderblock wall to the heating unit. It, too, appeared to be OK.

Jeff decided to rip out all the old piping and replace it. After obtaining a work permit,



This piece of gas piping passed through a sleeve in cinderblock.



Here's a piece of piping—from a different house—in which a sleeve and the piping rusted together.

he cut the piping under the house and pulled it out the sleeve in the cinderblock. It was then he noticed the pipe was deteriorated badly where it passed through the sleeve.

By code, nothing was wrong with the way the piping had been run through the cinderblock foundation. However, years of moisture sitting in the sleeve had caused the piping to rust and start leaking.

Jeff replaced the sleeve with a larger piece of PVC so moisture can't stay in the sleeve and cause the new piping to rust. He then called the city inspector to report the job complete. After approving the job, the city inspector called the gas company and authorized the meter to be unlocked and the gas to be turned on.

What are the lessons to be learned here? Inspect your gas lines periodically. If you smell gas, immediately call your local gas company. If there are signs of deterioration, call a certified contractor for service. 

(As explained by the author, Jeff holds a master gasfitter's license from the state of Virginia.—Ed.)