



My Basement Smells – What Causes That?

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Do you have smells coming from your basement? There is nothing good about that rotten or musty smell coming from your basement, and generally speaking, it won't go away on its own. Even worse, certain smells can be signs of a growing or dangerous problem in your basement that can affect you and your family's health and safety. Here are some of the possible causes and what you can do to fix it.

Moisture

While moisture or water in your basement doesn't smell by itself, it leads to lots of different things that do. If you want to rid your basement of these issues, you need to reduce the amount of moisture or water present to remove the smells.

- **Mold** – Mold gives off many different odors but is generally described as giving off a “musty” smell like rotting paper, rotting wood or even dirty socks. This musty smell is caused by the chemicals that come from the mold, known as MVOC's or microbial volatile organic compounds. These are given off as the mold consumes its food source, and the EPA¹ reports that they can be harmful to humans, causing eye, nose or throat irritation and can possibly damage the liver, kidney and central nervous system over long periods of exposure.
- **Mildew** – Much like mold, mildew can give off many different odors. While generally not as strong as the odor given off by mold, you can still have an odor if mildew is present. Mildew can also give off MVOC's just as mold can.
- **Dry rot** – Dry rot generally gives off a “earthy” odor like wet soil or a odor that smells like mushrooms. Left unattended, dry rot can destroy your home.
- **Wet rot** – Wet rot generally gives off a “wet” or “musty” smell that can often be confused with mold and mildew. Left unattended, wet rot can destroy your home.

Sewer or Gas Leak

If you have a “rotten egg” smell in your basement, it can be one of a few things:

- **Plumbing issue** – If you have a sewer line, waste trap or floor drain that is clogged, leaking or has dried out, you can easily have a smell like rotten eggs or decaying meat. The smell comes from decaying organic matter in the sewer and drain lines, which normally vents out of the house through the plumbing system into outside air. Prolonged exposure to sewer gas has been known to cause irritability, headaches, fatigue, dizziness and other health symptoms. A plumber can help you further identify and solve the problem.
- **Natural gas or propane leak** – Natural gas and propane have an additive, often a harmless chemical named “mercaptan”, added to them to help homeowners identify a leak. If you have this smell, get it checked by a professional **immediately!**

Rodent droppings or urine

Rodent droppings and urine generally have a strong, ammonia-like smell, often described as “stale urine”. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention² (CDC) reports that their urine and droppings

can cause health issues in humans, such as hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, leptospirosis, lymphocytic chorio-meningitis, salmonellosis and other diseases. Never mess with mice or rats in the home. Call and exterminator to get them out.

Laundry Issues

While it doesn't seem that obvious to some, you can get smells from your washer and dryer.

- Washer – Many of the newer high-efficiency washers, especially front loaders, are difficult to keep clean, causing them to give off smells and develop mold and mildew in the seals and other rubber and plastic parts, including the filters.
- Dryer – If your dryer vent is clogged or leaks, you may experience a build-up of moisture in the vent which can then spill over into your basement. You may get a musty odor from damp lint and other material in the vent, which actually allow mold growth. You may also get a “burning” burning smell. Either way, it's an indication that something needs to be fixed!

Organic Material Decay

If there are leaves or other organic material in your basement, crawl space, window or egress wells or outside door stairways, you may develop an earthy, musty odor which may remain until the material is consumed or removed.

Dead Animals

Checked your basement lately? Mice can enter through a hole in your basement the size of a dime. Larger animals can enter from the garage, through the walls and many other ways. Often “uninvited guests” hang out in the basement where they are least disturbed. Dead mice, bats, rats, racoons or squirrels can give off that “sick and sweet” smell that is caused by their decomposition – that smell we all hate. Make certain these critters don't have access to your basement to prevent this!

Cat or Pet Urine

If you have pets that have access to your basement, you may be noticing odors that their urine leaves behind. Cat urine, even when controlled with cat litter, can be especially pungent and linger in poorly circulating air for long periods of time.

Poor Air Quality

Studies show that up to 40% of the air that we breathe in our homes originates in the basement. Left to circulate through the basement without the introduction of clean, healthy air, odors and toxins can develop. Newer homes are built to be more energy-efficient, further aggravating this issue³. Learn more by visiting <https://ezbreathe.com/benefits/smells-odor>.

SOURCES:

¹ US Environmental Protection Agency

² US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

³ EZ Breathe Ventilation Systems